

**RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY WITHIN THE SIKH RELIGION: HOW
COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGISTS CAN HELP**

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A thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Wolverhampton for the degree of Doctor in Counselling Psychology.

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Abstract

This study investigated the spiritual and religious experience of members of the Sikh community with a focus on how such an experience affects their sense of wellbeing. Consequently, the central aim of this study is to explore how Sikhs use religion and spirituality with coping. This was examined by exploring how Sikhs deal with stressful events and how these impacted on their wellbeing. The thesis was comprised of two parts. Study one comprised of the thematic analysis of questionnaires. 56 UK based Sikh participants (23 males and 33 females; age range 17-62) took part. The findings from study one speculated that the older age group appeared more accepting of their religion and spirituality suggesting maybe they are less occupied by a quest to explore their life through religion and spirituality than the 20-30 year old age group. Consequently, study two looked more closely at participants aged between 20-30 year olds to further explore their lived experience. In line with the IPA methodology, a small well-defined opportunity sample of six people (4 males and 2 females) in the Sikh faith, who have been practicing their religion for at least 2-3 years and between the ages of 20-30 were invited to participate in the interviews. Four superordinate themes were found which represented an overall story. The themes were namely, religious and spiritual struggles; religion and spirituality assisting with the development of self and identity; spiritual striving and aids to well-being: religious/spiritual coping. It is hoped that findings from this research will help to inform our understanding of how Sikh client's religious and spiritual beliefs influences their wellbeing as well as incorporating this

knowledge into the therapy process to make good clinical judgements. This study will enhance research in counselling psychology with regards to religion and spirituality and mental health specifically with regards to young Sikh's.

Key words:

Religiosity, Spiritual, Sikh, Mental Health, Well-being, Counselling

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CONFIDENTIALITY

The contents of this Doctoral Portfolio has been appropriately anonymised in order to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity. All identifiable information has been removed including participant names which have been replaced with pseudonyms.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction & Literature Review

Counselling psychology operates within a multicultural context requiring that those practicing take steps to increase their multicultural competencies such as the black and ethnic minority groups. According to the Professional Practice Guidelines of the BPS (2005) counselling psychologists are required to “make themselves knowledgeable about the diverse experiences of the clients they work with and challenge the views of people who pathologise on the basis of such aspects as....racial identity and religious and spiritual views (page 7)” as well as to “respect the diversity of beliefs and values held within society...(page 3).” The central aim of this study is to explore how Sikhs use religion and spirituality with coping with stress and its effect on their wellbeing. It is hoped that this study will provide therapists knowledge of Sikh’s and their religious and spiritual views to inform their therapeutic practice.

It is important to state that throughout the study Sikhs will be described as an ethnic group as reported in the Census summary report (2017) or “South Asian”. As Sikhs originate from India, Punjab, they form part of the global classification of “South Asian.” These terms will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

It is unlikely for counselling psychologists to continuously and effectively develop their multicultural competencies if research into religious and spiritual views held by individuals from a range of diverse cultural backgrounds remains scarce. Sikhism was recorded at being 0.8% of the UK population, and is most strongly represented in the West Midlands when compared to the rest of the UK (Census, 2011). It has been reported that this ethnic group has been under

researched particularly in relation to counselling (Sandhu, 2004; Morjaria-Keval, 2006). Based on the national mental illness statistics, 1 in 4 people in the UK will suffer at least one diagnosable episode of mental illness (McManus, Meltzer, Brugha, Bebbington & Jenkins, 2009). This would be equivalent to 200,000 Sikhs or over 900,000 Southern Asians from every religious background. Unfortunately, the traditions and cultural practices as well as the Asian value systems can worsen the negative impact of mental illness due to how it is perceived by families, friends, clinicians and sometimes by the service user or the non-user (see <http://www.sikhhealth.org>). Consequently this may mean that mental health services are not accessed for support and the individual may have no other form of support.

Mental illness stigma, superstitions, taboos and discrimination often result in South Asians not receiving timely or appropriate access to mental health services and a tendency to come into services in crisis (Kramer, Kwong, Lee & Chung, 2002). Moreover, with few exceptions, most research into Asian communities tends to be quantitative in approach therefore providing numerical data and quantifying opinions and attitudes rather than uncovering trends and diving deeper into the problem. In addition research is mostly based on American or Canadian populations. Furthermore, most of these studies focus on traumatic experiences with little mention of influences from South Asians' spirituality and religiosity. Spirituality and religion can be a big part of an individual's world and may have an influence on coping and wellbeing (Pargament, 1997). Consequently, this study intends to explore the spiritual and religious experience of the Sikh community with a focus on how such

experiences affect their sense of wellbeing. Findings from this research will inform our understanding with regards to:

- How religion and spirituality impact on wellbeing within the Sikh Community.
- The possible therapeutic implications of a Sikh's religious and spiritual influences will be inferred.

This study focused on addressing the above in two parts. Study one utilised questionnaires to gain insight of Sikh understanding of religion and spirituality across all age groups. Study two focused on a particular age group (20-30 year olds) to explore further the religious and spiritual influences on their wellbeing. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the responses to the questionnaire with open questions in study 1. This particular method allowed for flexibility in the choice of theoretical framework. Through this flexibility, thematic analysis affords a rich, detailed and complex description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The key findings from the questionnaire study then informed study 2 using Interpretative Phenomological Analysis (IPA). As little research has been conducted within the Sikh faith in relation to wellbeing, interviews were carried out with a homogenous sample in order to fully make sense of the participants' perspective of religion and spirituality and how these relate to their sense of wellbeing. This part of the study allowed for further exploration of how participants made sense of their personal and social world within a religious and spiritual context. As IPA is concerned with an individual's view of the world, it therefore enabled in-depth questions about their lived experience.

Knowledge gleaned from this study will be beneficial to counselling psychologists to empower and enable clients in their therapeutic journeys by considering their clients' religious and spiritual influences into the therapy process. Consequently, such knowledge will help to influence the Working Practice Guidelines in defining better psychological standards for psychologists. In addition such research can be incorporated in counselling training in the area of multicultural practice to bring more awareness and guidance.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1 Overview of religion and spirituality

There has been a fuzzy boundary with regards to the definitions and meanings of religion and spirituality (Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter, & Belavich, 1997). It is therefore important to define spirituality and religion as they have been closely linked historically (Worthington, Hook, Davis, & McDaniel, 2011). Nash and Stewart (2002) argue that spirituality supports all aspects of human development by providing meaning and purpose in life, creating harmony and balance in relationships. Some recognise that religion may hold negative connotations and seek to avoid the risk of any contamination between it and spirituality. For example, Lochner and Coyle (2011) suggest that religion has often been associated with negative qualities such as conflict, control, judgementalism and anti-intellectualism within Western liberal social discourse.

In relation to wellbeing and mental health, spirituality and religiosity remain two diverse variables that are studied. Psychologists typically describe religion and spirituality in related but separate terms. Spirituality is broadly defined in two ways. One manner in which spirituality typically has been viewed is a private, personal, affective experience with “the Divine” (e.g., Richards & Bergin, 1997). In addition, spirituality also has been conceptualised as that of a search or quest for the Sacred (e.g., Pargament, 1999). These broad definitions allow for dialogue and research to occur across denominations and disciplines.

Conversely, religiosity although recognized as a multidimensional construct, frequently has been considered as an institutional set of beliefs and practices (Richards & Bergin, 2005). Thus, religiousness often has been distinguished

from spirituality on the basis of cognitive beliefs and behavioural practices related to God rather than an affective/emotional experience of God.

Some have suggested that it is possible to engage in a spirituality that is devoid of a religious context, or to experience a corporate religiousness without experiencing a personal spiritual life (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 2005). Religious rituals or practices such as prayer and meditation serve as important functions. For example, Poloma and Gallup (1991) claimed that the importance of prayer is largely due to its “improving a sense of well-being” (p. 5). Jackson and Bergeman (2011) also mentioned that prayer and worship correlate positively with personal control, which leads to improved well-being. Being part of a religious or spiritual community can also have a positive effect on wellbeing. Saroglou and Cohen (2013) suggest that being a part of the same religious community or religious culture promotes a sense of belonging and connection to God. Belonging to a group provides a social world and connecting with others. Hood, Hill and Spilka (2009) mention that people seek meaning about their place in the social world through connections to others and social roles.

Rather than divorcing religion from spirituality, there have been others who have a unified and broad approach that captures religion to be comprised of the characteristics of organizational constructs as well as the experiences of the sacred (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In the Zinnbauer et al. (1997) study, 305 individuals from various professional and religious backgrounds took part in a study where they were required to write down their own definitions of religiousness and spirituality. They used content analysis to analyse the data

and found that 74% identified themselves as both spiritual and religious. For example, they may have described a personal and private spirituality as well as incorporating a belief in God and the practice of prayer. This study helps to inform study one which also looks at an individual's definitions of religion and spirituality. Thematic analysis was used instead of content analysis to provide a more qualitative and detailed nuanced account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore only one particular religious background, Sikhism, was explored to gain insight and knowledge in one area, a religion that seems under researched.

In relation to being a part of a religious or spiritual community and belonging to such a social group, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (1979) proposed an interesting concept. The theory discusses a systems theory wherein individual differences are accounted for by intricate interactions among systems of varying levels. The strength of this theory is that it accounts for the influence from the individual and their microsystems from the bottom up (from individual to culture). A person is affected by everything in their surrounding environment. This concept related to the social relationships (i.e., making connections to others) and the world around a developing person. The social world affects a person's development as the person brings about changes to their environment and the different levels to the environment.

Bronfenbrenner divided the environment into five different levels: Microsystems, Mesosystems, Exosystems, Macrosystems and Chronosystem. The Microsystems are people in the immediate environment wherein the individual has direct interactions, for example, family, peer group, work place, and school.

In relation to religion and spirituality, an individual could be born into a particular religious faith. This can also include peers from the same religious or spiritual background. The Mesosystem is related to the processes and link between the microsystems, for example, with regards to a child's school and home. For example, this can be an individual's place of worship and home. The Exosystem relates to the processes and influences that directly impact on the person's microsystems, for example, with regards to a child, factors affect the parent's wellbeing such as parent's workplace or social support (which could be from a religious or spiritual community). The Macrosystem relates to the broader systems involving a given culture or subculture. And finally, the Chronosystem extends the environment from the here and now and relates to the change or consistency over time within the characteristics of the person and their environment, for example, changes over the life course in family structure, socioeconomic status, employment etc. This theory can help to understand how belonging to a particular religious or spiritual group can have an effect on an individual at different levels in terms of connecting to others.

1.1.2. Spirituality, Religion & Mental Health

In relation to mental health, there has been some hesitation from practitioners in confronting spiritual and religious issues. For example, in a study of religious and spiritual psychotherapy behaviours, Frazier and Hansen (2009) found that professional psychologists were reluctant to discuss these issues not only with their clients but also with their colleagues. King-Spooner (2001) reported that practitioners felt religious beliefs lay outside the remit of therapy, or it was part of a client's pathology therefore this was not explored further. Within psychoanalysis, Freud (1927, 1989) viewed religion and spirituality as neurotic

and regressive and a way for a client to protect themselves from their own limitations and vulnerabilities. O'Connor and Vanderburg (2005) observed that Psychologists were likely to view less mainstream religious beliefs as pathological due to lack of familiarity with such religions. O'Conner and Vanderburg (2005) went on to say that being unfamiliar with religious beliefs could mean possibly making poorer clinical judgements.

Whilst such hesitation around religion and spirituality existed, it has also been challenged and explored by other researchers. For example, Hage (2006) argued that therapists routinely address a range of other sensitive topics, such as race and sexuality, yet religious and spiritual issues are not addressed in therapy. Rizzuto's (1979) seminal paper applied psychodynamic ideas to religion and spirituality in a productive way by using life histories of twenty patients and argued that they draw representations of God from different sources as well as being an important aspect in a client's view of themselves, others and the world around them. The term representations of God refers to inner representations of God. Rizzuto (1979) mentioned that similar representations are created by the child in a psychic space where transitional objects (e.g., toys, blankets and mental representations) are provided with their powerfully real and illusory lives (Rizutto, 1979, p.177). This is created directly out of the lived experience of the relationship with its parents or principal carers (Rizutto, 1979, p178).

There seems to have been an increased interest in spirituality and religion during recent years, with a large number of conferences, seminars, workshops, books, and special issues in major professional journals on spirituality and

religion and psychology integration (e.g., Hartz, 2005; Lochner & Coyle, 2011; McMinn & Dominquez, 2005; Plante, 2007; Plante & Sherman, 2001; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Sperry & Shafranske, 2005). The most recent contribution by Lochner and Coyle (2011) reviewed literature to draw conclusions as to how clinical, counselling and psychotherapeutic psychologists can work with clients' religious and spiritual material to engage with their life world and meaning-making systems. In their view "to ignore or attempt to deconstruct the religious and spiritual aspects of these could carry major adverse implications" (Lochner & Coyle, 2011, p.1). They concluded that therapists should be encouraged to engage constructively and respectfully with clients' religious and spiritual issues to enrich therapeutic experience and effectiveness. This study will provide knowledge of the Sikh religion and the effects it has on participants' wellbeing and how they may cope so that Counselling Psychologists can engage with this group constructively and respectfully.

The association between religion and spirituality and mental health is complex. Brawer, Handel, Fabricatore, Roberts, and Wajda-Johnston (2002) found that religion and spirituality can contribute to increased rates of wellbeing and life satisfaction and a decreased rate of "suicide, substance abuse and anti-social behaviour" (p.4). Similarly, Larimore, Parker and Crowther (2002) found that religious and spiritual beliefs help improve and maintain good mental and physical health. On the other hand, having rigid religious beliefs that are based on sin and guilt can increase mental illness such as depression as well as delusions and hallucinations (Fallot, 2001).

It is important to note and not overlook that the effect of religiosity on wellbeing is not always necessarily positive. Menagi, Harrell, and June (2008) found in their research that social support did not always mediate the relation between religiosity and wellbeing. In addition, Brodsky reported (2000) that a failure to reach a connection with other members resulted in negative outcomes such as alienation. However, some contradictory evidence reported in the literature may be due to different measures being used and different definitions of religiosity (see Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Lewis & Cruise, 2006).

In the literature to date there seems to be some evidence to suggest that the way an individual defines religion and spirituality may vary dependent upon individual differences such as age, gender, education and cultural background. There is an indication that children as young as 5 years old have a concept of God as being omniscient (Gimenez Dasi, Guerrero, & Harris, 2005) showing that there is some evidence that young children have some awareness of religion. There is speculation that religion is diminishing in each successive generation based on declines in religious attendance (Wuthnow, 2007), however these have been observed in the United States. In another study conducted by Cherry, DeBerg and Porterfield (2001), they found students' interest in religion was quite strong. Again, these were students from American Universities. This study will attempt to investigate Sikh individual's definition of religion and spirituality and explore particular individual differences such as age, gender and education to some extent.

Wink and Dillon (2002, 2008) investigated longitudinally participants' spirituality and religiousness over the lifespan. They followed 200 participants who were

born in the 1920s over a 60 year period to old age. Overall there was a significant increase in spirituality with age with marked gender differences: early to middle aged men exhibited increased spirituality and this occurred for women in middle to late adulthood. In women, negative life events such as financial worries and conflicts also had an effect on spirituality. Although a longitudinal study is deemed as sound research, participants born in different eras would have been exposed to different life events. For example, there have been many significant events since the 1920s for women such as women being given the right to vote and work in the 1920s, the first woman Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, appointed in UK, and the first woman appointed to the US Supreme Court in the 1980s. Consequently, such improvements in women's status means they would be exposed to different negative life events over the 60 year period and at different times in their spirituality. The drawback of a longitudinal study is that participants drop out over time for various reasons such as moving away, age related difficulties, illness or regrettably pass away. This shrinks the sample size which subsequently decreases the amount of data collected which then makes it difficult to apply to a larger population. This study will attempt to consider variables such as age and gender in the present time to attempt to reduce the variables that allows participants to withdraw for reasons stated above.

In terms of gender differences in religion, this is an area that surprisingly has been understudied. Voicu's (2009) longitudinal study showed that as gender roles change, religiousness has been declining. However this is not universal. Within the Christian culture, males are less likely than females to attend religious services or declare their religious affiliation (Smith, Denton, Faris, &

Regnerus, 2002). Muslim women in Bukina Faso stay firm in their beliefs in female genital circumcision (Hayford & Trinitapoli, 2011). Beit-Hallahmi (2003) offers a summary of gender differences and the many theoretical explanations including individual differences, personality, socialisation and effects of society.

These studies mentioned have been largely quantitative in nature using suitable tests and scale ratings. Although quantitative data and longitudinal studies were conducted, these mainly quantified people's behaviours, opinions and attitudes using numerical data and statistics. Qualitative research is rather more exploratory in nature by comparison and useful in gaining understanding to the reasons as to why people behave in a particular way and why they hold a particular opinion and attitude by uncovering trends and digging deeper into the issue with a smaller sample.

1.1.4. Counselling Psychology with respect to Spirituality

Counselling psychology operates with an “anti-discriminatory manner” (The Health and Care Professions Council Standard of Proficiency, 2012, Standard 1a.2), requiring Counselling Psychologists to have high standards in anti-discriminatory practice appropriate to the pluralistic nature of society today (DCoP, 2006). According to the Professional Practice Guidelines of the BPS, Counselling Psychologists are required to “make themselves knowledgeable about the diverse experiences of the clients they work with and challenge the views of people who pathologise on the basis of such aspects as...religious and spiritual views” (p. 7). Researchers such as Faiver, O'Brien and Ingersoll (2000) and Hagedorn (2005) stipulate that we must also understand our own spiritual and religious beliefs, or lack thereof, if we hope to gain an in-depth appreciation

of the beliefs of our clients'. In addition, Counselling Psychologists are required to "respect the diversity of beliefs and values held within society..." (DCoP, 2006, pg.3). Such an endeavour could serve to explore the importance of spirituality in a counselling relationship. Possibly having rigid ideas of religion and spirituality, and not having that flexibility may hinder the counselling process and undermine the integrity of the profession. Consequently, Myer and Williard (2003) recommended for counsellors-in-training to be given opportunities to explore and understand their own spirituality and meaning-making processes as well as being exposed to many diverse spiritual and religious beliefs and values. To date, there has been little evidence to suggest this has happened in the fourteen years since this suggestion was made.

It is important to note that many of the great movements in counselling psychology were grounded in the strong religious or spiritual faith of the leader (Berke, 1996; Erikson, 1972, p.19; Frankl, 1973; Freud, 1963, p.11; Jung, 1964; Rogers, 1951). For example, Rogers expressed this spiritual or mystical direction in several of his writings (e.g., Rogers, 1980a, p. 129). Rogers' spiritual or mystical interpretation of his own therapeutic experiences appears to have emerged, in part, out of his work with large community meeting groups (Rogers, 1980b). In Jung's book *Man and His Symbols* (1964) he discusses the unconscious as a guide or an adviser of the conscious, and in his study of human beings and their spiritual problems found that for people who have and believe in a religion, the psychological regulation of their lives is affected by religious symbols and their dreams also revolved around them. Frankl (1973) discusses depression on a spiritual level as "tension between what the person is and what he ought to be." (1973, p. 202). He explains that because a

person's goals feel unreachable, they lose a sense of their own future. As time goes on, that person becomes disgusted at themselves and thus projects it on others. He states that the gap between what is, and what should be, forms a "gaping abyss" (1973, p. 202).

The discipline of counselling psychology, with its emphasis on the practitioner as scientist, has actively taken account of spiritual experience rather than religious experience as a means of promoting healing and emotional well-being in clients (Hayes & Cowie, 2005). Similarly, Plumb (2011) reports that spirituality, not necessarily religion, is important in therapists' lives and the work they do with clients. She went on to say that it would be a disservice to the client if counsellors or therapists did not prepare themselves personally and professionally in order to allow aspects of religion and spirituality in the therapeutic space. This could give the client the impression that it is not safe to discuss or disclose.

As the central aim of this study is to explore how Sikhs use religion and spirituality with coping, it is important to evaluate literature with regards to coping, emotional regulation and identity.

1.2 Coping, Religious coping and Stress

Folkman and Lazarus (1980, p. 223) define coping as "the cognitive and behavioural efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them". Literature on stress and coping has typically focused on the actions taken to tolerate or minimise a perceived stress (reactive coping). A future orientated coping has been developed called proactive coping. One such theory by Schwarzer (2000) emphasised that

proactive coping is a process whereby future goals are assessed and strategies are developed to achieve those goals successfully.

Coping with stressful events is an essential role in an individual's development. Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) found that the greatest change in development of coping appeared from middle childhood to adolescence. However the ability to apply certain coping strategies such as planning did not fully develop until late adolescence or early adulthood. Coping has also been linked with psychological functioning including the quality of social relationships (Zambianchi & Ricci Bitt, 2014) and is therefore an important function in an individual's life.

Religious coping, according to Pargament (1997) is "the search for significance in times of stress" (p. 90). This fits in well with Hogg, Adelman and Blagg's (2010) study on religion and uncertainty which concluded that people are more likely to turn to religious beliefs and practices in times of greater uncertainty. Pargament, Koenig and Perez (2000) described five functions of religious coping including finding meaning to a challenging event, gaining control, gaining comfort by achieving closeness to God, increasing intimacy with God and others and aiding a life transformation. The different types of religious coping strategies were either helpful or potentially quite harmful (Koenig, 1998; Pargament & Brant, 1998)

1.2.2. Emotional regulation

Emotional regulation focuses on managing emotions. It is defined by Gross (1998) as the process by which an individual influences which emotions they

have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them. It involves behaviours, strategies and skills which is said to be monitored, evaluated, modulated and inhibited. This enhances the emotional experience and expression in a goal-orientated way (Gross and Thompson, 2009; Thompson and Meyer, 2009).

According to Diamond and Aspinwall (2009) emotional regulation continues to develop throughout an individual's life and plays an important role in many psychological processes such as social relationships (Lopes, Salovey, Cote, & Beers, 2005). Although a concept that develops throughout life, Thompson and Meyer (2009) found that near the end of adolescence, an individual is more responsible for managing their own emotions and will employ strategies tailored to their personal goals and specific sociocultural contexts.

Regulating emotions also requires an element of self-control. Baumeister and Exline (1999, 2000) discussed that self-control can also be seen as self-regulation. This is reported as a master virtue in the sense that it seemed essential to support people to avoid many vices or sins and behave virtuously. Self-control is a central function of the self and an important key to success in life.

1.3. Development of identity

Erikson (1959) proposed a theory of psychosocial development in terms of identity which comprised of eight stages from infancy to adulthood. At each stage an individual experiences a psychosocial crisis which results in a positive or negative outcome that affected personality development. For example, individuals between 18-40 years old (categorised as Young Adult by Erikson)

were classed at being at stage 6 where the psychosocial crisis is focused upon Intimacy versus Isolation. At this stage relationships with others are explored and considerable importance is placed upon these relationships which eventually leads to a commitment. Being successful in such a stage means that you have a happy relationship and feel safe and secure within them. Individuals between 40-65 years old (categorised as Middle Adulthood by Erikson) were classed as stage 7. At this stage an individual's career is established and they have a stable relationship and may begin a family. This developed a sense of being a part of the bigger picture.

Interestingly, religious development is linked to identity development and is most distinct within adolescence and old age. Religion offers individuals stability across the lifespan in an environment that is consistent and supportive (Erikson, 1968; Klaassen, McDonnald, & James, 2006; Marcia, 1980; Templeton & Eccles, 2006).

Fowler's six stages of faith (1981) is closely related to Erikson's work. Individuals in their mid-twenties to late thirties were seen to be at stage four of Fowler's stages of faith. This was categorised as the "Individuative-Reflective" stage where angst and struggle were prominent and an individual took personal responsibility for their beliefs and feelings. At this stage, individuals explored their own values and religious beliefs in great detail and carried this out. Individuals in their late 40s and 50s and above could be seen as being at the "Universalizing" stage (or stage six), which was also classed as "enlightenment" with transcending belief systems to achieve a sense of oneness with all beings.

As the Sikh religion is the focus of the thesis, the salient aspects of their customs will now be reviewed, followed by an overview of the views of mental illness within this religious group.

1.4. Sikhs

Sikhism, although one of the youngest religions, is the fourth largest religion in the UK (Census, 2011) with approximately 0.8% of the UK population being Sikh. Sikhs originate from India, Punjab and form part of the global classification of "South Asian." Sikh is a phrase that means, 'disciple' or 'learner' (Chilana, 2005, p. 108) or seeker of truth.

A monotheistic religion, it was founded by the Guru Nanak Dev Ji in 1469. Guru Nanak Dev Ji was the first Guru (teacher who brings you from darkness into light) of ten. All ten Gurus composed the current living Guru, the Sikh Holy Scripture, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, compiled in 1708. Sikh spirituality is centred round the need to understand and experience God, and as the Holy Scriptures quote, to eventually become one with God.

The phrase 'dukh' is used within the Sikh Indian culture to mean 'suffering'. *Dukh* is related to the idea of karma and a belief in the cycle of reincarnation, and Sikhs may believe that the suffering they experience in their current life is the direct consequence of the actions they performed in their previous lives (Sandhu, 2004). Self-discipline appears important to protect against internal sources of suffering. These internal sources of suffering that can cause distress are named as the five vices or the five passions, which include, lust, anger,

attachment (to worldly possessions and people), greed and false pride or ego. External forces, possibly from significant life events, must be overcome by not being a victim, taking personal responsibility and transforming their own circumstances, according to Sandhu (2004). In order to heal from such suffering (internal and external), Sikhs believe that this begins from the realization of the spiritual self and consciousness which spirals through 'panj khands' (five spheres or realms). These realms are, 'dharma' (righteousness), 'gian' (knowledge), 'saram' (effort), 'karam' (grace) and 'sach' (truth). These are guided by the principles of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

Sikhs believe in reincarnation and that everything happens accordance to 'hukam' (God's Will) and that their karma is a result of the good and bad deeds performed in their previous lives (Ahluwaila & Alimchandani, 2013). Therefore, if a stressful life event occurs, it is not to be taken personally or that it is personally their fault but to surrender to God's will and act gracefully by moving on. Many Sikhs meditate on the word 'Waheguru' (Almighty God) in times of trouble to remind them of surrendering to God's Will or having faith in God ('bharosa'). Meditating in this way affects their wellbeing in a positive way.

1.4.1. Sikh identity

In Sikhism, religion and identity are perceived to be intertwined from before birth due to the belief in reincarnation and "old souls" (Mensching, 1976; Purdam et al., 2007; Smith, 2004). All Sikhs have a unique identity in having the surnames Singh (meaning Lion) for men and Kaur (meaning princess) for women. The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, who edified the Sikh religion and outlined the code of conduct for Sikhs, and his wife Mata Sahib Kaur are seen as a father

and mother figure, and hold the status of the spiritual king and queen. Sikhs are seen as ambassadors of their own faith where they have a duty to uphold *dharma* (the eternal law of the cosmos) and righteousness. Sikhs also have their own immediately recognisable attire and unique appearance. Nielsen and White (2008) discussed that people use outward signs such as religious dress or grooming, to signify religious identity, group membership, and status. Baptised males and females can wear a 'bana' (traditional dress attire) and a 'dastar' (turban). Looking further into the Sikh Religion respectively, the *bana* is seen as a mark of royalty and belonging to a brotherhood of Sikhs. Just as the monarch of a country wears attire that is different to society to express their authority and royal status, so for Sikhs the *bana* is seen as the royal uniform and the *dastar* classed as crown. There seemed to be significance and importance attached to such attire.

1.2.2. Sikhs belief about mental illness

Sikhs still share beliefs and practices with the wider South Asian community. Therefore these can be seen as cultural concepts rather than specific to the Sikh religious understanding of mental health. This includes believing that mental illness is caused by the evil eye or possession by evil spirits or demons (Singh, 2008). To overcome this, rituals such as taking a bath in holy rivers and exorcism are practiced (Das, 1987; Singh, 2004). Singh (2008) stated that South Asians perceived having a mental illness as a taboo subject which was not disclosed to family members or the rest of the community in fear of dishonour or shame. Since stressful life events can be seen as a result of present or past bad deeds (due to a belief in reincarnation and karma) it is understandable that individuals would keep their mental illness a secret and

would not want it be shared. However this also means that they do not access mental health services at the appropriate time and as Kramer, Kwong, Lee and Chung (2002) stated, they tend to come to services in crisis. Consequently, these problems were, at times, rarely shared with health professionals (including the doctor) and were often communicated as somatic symptoms, and the mental illness was left unreported.

1.2.3. Sikhs and Mental Well-being Literature

A growing set of evidence has indicated that religiosity is linked to well-being and other positive outcomes in general (Kim-Prieto, 2013). Religions contribution to wellbeing and positive life experience has been researched within positive psychology. It has been suggested that individuals who class themselves as religious have used their religion to cope with adversity and have found it to help with accepting reality, gaining courage, confronting limitations, and recognising purpose and achieving growth (Mattis, 2002). However much of the research has relied on the Christian faith and focused on participants from the US or Western Europe (Kim-Prieto, 2013). There has, however, been growing research to look at other cultures and religions from around the world. For example, religiosity predicted wellbeing for Muslim undergraduates in Egypt and Kuwait (Abdel-Khalek, 2012; Sahrainen, Gholami, Javadpour, & Omidvar, 2013), and a positive relation was found between religiosity and life satisfaction in Hindu, Muslim and Christian students in South Africa (Patel, Ramgoon, & Paruk, 2009) to name but a few. However, the Sikh religion has not been researched sufficiently in mental wellbeing and coping. Clearly, the research from the different religions so far does suggest that the positive effect of religiosity is not just restricted to certain religions. Research has implied several reasons as to why religiosity has a positive effect on wellbeing; one such reason

may be organised communal worship. This provides an individual with social support which can provide a sense of belonging and commonality. Furthermore, religion also communicates a sense of meaning and purpose to life, which is linked to positive functioning. In particular, Steger and Frazier (2005) found that the meaning of life facilitated the positive relations between religiosity and psychological health.

Saini (2014) researched quantitatively into identity, perceived discrimination, and psychological well-being (particularly, life satisfaction and resilience) in 228 Sikh Americans. Saini (2014) reported that participants who were described as having a strong psychological identity as being Sikh also reported higher life satisfaction. In this study, psychological identity was defined as having positive feelings about being a Sikh, and/or a sense of belonging and similarity with other Sikhs.

There appears to be limited literature in Counselling Psychology with regards to mental health and wellbeing within the Sikh faith. One exception is that of Singh's (2008) Sikh spiritual model of counselling, following his work with clients from a Sikh background, who proposed that this model could be used universally. Singh (2008) has attempted to bring awareness of a Sikh client's world-view and cultural specific models of counselling. He believed knowledge of Sikh spirituality could help to reduce stress in the client and recognised that this could help clients from a Sikh background in treating their psychosomatic symptoms and improve their overall mental health. The hexagon model was created by Singh (2008) to represent the six steps of helping a Sikh client reduce stress and promote better well-being. He encouraged the idea that clients required assistance in believing that, instead of attributing it to God's will,

they were responsible for their own will to shape their own destiny. This is not necessarily a concept specific to Sikhism and may be seen as a universal concept, however Singh (2008) states steps that relate to concepts in Sikhism.

Singh (2008) provides a comprehensive knowledge of the Sikh religion and spirituality, however only three vignettes were presented as examples of the model's application, therefore, to verify the success of the model would require an attempt to use this model with additional Sikh clients universally. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any further work on Singh's (2008) findings. It will be reviewed whether Singh's (2008) study will be applicable to this study.

1.5. Conclusion

Counselling psychologists, as well as other therapists help clients to strive to make meaning in their lives and help them through stressful and challenging times, however Slattery and Park (2011a) point out that the pathways and foundational beliefs upon which we construct global meaning are often divergent. This research attempts to provide therapists the knowledge of the lives of Sikhs and their differing yet similar views on religion and spirituality. Therefore the aim of study one is to offer the researcher insight into the meanings of religion and spirituality within a Sikh Community exploring particular individual differences such as age, gender and education to some extent.

Similar to Sikhism, other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism and Islam have organized communal worship which is a significant part of religious life.

This provides an individual with social support which can provide a sense of belonging and commonality. All religions have their own set of rules and guidelines, a belief in God and have an element of meditation and prayer. For many religions, including Sikhism, religion communicates a sense of meaning and purpose to life, which has been linked to positive functioning (Steger & Frazier, 2005). However, the Sikh religion has not been researched sufficiently especially in terms of wellbeing and mental health. Research on other religions have found a link between religiosity and life satisfaction. For example, positive relation was found between religiosity and life satisfaction in Hindu, Muslim and Christian students in South Africa (Patel, Ramgoon, & Paruk, 2009). This is a concept that is important in therapy for self-awareness.

Even in cases where the therapist and client share the same religion and faith, there will be individual differences in terms of religious and spiritual beliefs, particularly when it concerns real-life circumstances. Morrison and Borgen (2010) state that even when a therapist and client shares cultural boundaries, the psychologist's sense of connection with the client may unconsciously exclude meaningful explorations of the client's religiousness or spirituality and empathy may be hindered. Consequently for psychologists to relate to the Sikh Population, the aim of study two is to explore the personal experience of Sikhs and their personal perceptions of religion and spirituality to explore whether this had an effect on their wellbeing and ability to deal with stresses.

It would be beneficial for the Division of Counselling Psychology to apply such findings to the therapeutic work that Psychologists do in terms of relating with the Sikh population. It is important to be familiar with the Sikh religion and

culture particularly the way in which the religion's guidelines and regulations, as well as meditation and praying benefit Sikhs with coping with difficulties. It is hoped that the information and knowledge provided in this study will give therapists a general awareness of the differences in Sikh definitions of religion and spirituality with reference to their age, gender and culture (whether they were born in the UK or not) as well as the way their religious and spiritual beliefs help them in their daily lives. Consequently, it is important that clinicians actively seek to understand the client's spiritual orientation rather than making assumptions or using religious stereotypes. It is hoped that this study will provide an initial platform in terms of the therapeutic approach (person centred) to help therapists inform their practice.

CHAPTER 2: Methodology

2.1. A qualitative approach

Research studies concerning spirituality and religion have been essentially quantitative using particular tests and scale ratings with a large sample (see Denton, Faris, Regnerus, & Smith 2002; Wuthnow, 2007; Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001), qualitative approaches are rare (for example, Mattis, 2002). The majority of quantitative studies in the psychology of religion and spirituality mainly measured people's behaviours, opinions and attitudes towards their meanings and stance. As discussed in the research findings (see chapter 1 introduction) there is a fuzzy boundary with regards to the definitions and meanings of religion and spirituality in the view of most people, therefore using a quantitative method to examine a survey study such as this study will be difficult. For example, using a quantitative method will only quantify the attitudes and opinions however this study would like to dive deeper into the problem to provide further insight, which a qualitative approach will provide. Consequently, a quantitative design will not be effective to answer the research questions proposed for this study. In contrast to quantitative research (see Wink & Dillon, 2002, 2008; Voicu, 2009), qualitative research can be more exploratory in nature, and valuable in increasing understanding of the reasons why people behave in a particular way and why they hold a particular opinion or attitude by digging deeper into the issue and uncovering trends with a smaller sample. Qualitative approach will allow this study to explore Sikh participant's views and opinions on religion and spirituality and their impact on wellbeing as well as being able to increase our understanding of Sikh clients using a smaller sample, as in the second part of the study. With this in mind, it was decided to adopt a

qualitative methodology. Such approaches have the advantage of allowing in-depth and detailed study of experiences that are not easily quantifiable, as in this study of a 'lived experience'. A further advantage was that such an approach allows for the emergence of unanticipated findings (Barker et al., 2002). This is an advantage as interventions being led by service users are more likely to be effective and more likely to be efficacious as people will engage with them and adhere, when compared to interventions designed or led by practitioners who may lack insight into the cultural norms.

2.2. Overview of methodology

This section explains the rationale for the chosen methodologies in order to address the research aims. Two distinct qualitative methodologies were applied. Study one was conducted first and used thematic analysis to explore Sikh participants meaning of religion and spirituality from all ages. This method was applied with the view to include a larger sample which would then complement study two which comprised of a more focused sample whose interviews were analysed using IPA. The aim of study two was to explore the personal experience of Sikhs and their personal perceptions of religion and spirituality to explore whether this had an effect on their wellbeing and ability to deal with stresses

The philosophical standpoints of both methodologies will be considered first before discussing the rationale for using a mixed method design.

2.3. Philosophical standpoint

Thematic analysis is not linked to any specific theoretical framework or epistemological stance, therefore it can be used within different frameworks –

an essentialist/realist method, a constructionist, or a contextualist method. The realist approach considers the participant's reality in terms of meaning and experiences, the constructionist method focuses on the effects of these within a society, the contextualist method considers both essentialism and constructionism. Therefore the contextualist method looks at the participants' experiences and meanings and the way society affects those meanings, whilst keeping in mind the material as well as its limits. The questionnaire study will attempt to use the contextualist method to achieve a fuller picture of the participants' experiences and realities by exploring their meanings of religion and spirituality within a Sikh context.

IPA has a distinctive epistemological framework and is informed by drawing concepts from "three key areas of philosophy of knowledge, phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p.11). Phenomenology involves exploring an individual's own personal perception of a particular event or state (phenomena) rather than an objective account of the particular event. For example, this study is attempting to explore the lived experiences of religion and spirituality of Sikh individuals and the effects of this on wellbeing. The study will be interested in those experiences that are significant to those Sikh individuals. Therefore this form of enquiry in 'being phenomenological' involves taking a quality that occurs in everyday life and exploring it and its meaning (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The second key philosophy of IPA, hermeneutics, is the theory of interpretation, and IPA represents a 'double hermeneutics' meaning that IPA not only tries to make sense of the participants' lives experience or personal world but also takes into account how the researcher or investigator is attempting to understand the

participants constructed understanding (Eger, 1999). The third key philosophy of IPA, idiography, means that IPA focuses on how a particular experience has been understood from a particular perspective in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009).

2.4. Justification for mixed methods

In the first part of the study thematic analysis was adopted to explore, flexibly and in more detail, the understanding of the Sikh community and how they deal with stresses and manage their wellbeing in light of their religious belief and practice. The procedures of thematic analysis helped to identify patterns across the entire data-set. It was used to identify, analyse and extract themes from the questionnaires in the first part of the study.

IPA was then used to refine and examine in depth the lived experience of Sikhs, gaining supplementary knowledge concerning what it was about religion and spirituality specifically that helped with their wellbeing. IPA allowed for further depth and richness of data by staying close to the data and identifying themes arising organically from the responses and developing codes to describe them. This allowed the opportunity to focus on the unique characteristics of each individual participant, as each data item was coded and themes were developed, whereas the thematic analysis only allowed the opportunity to identify patterns across the entire data-set.

The first part of the study used a survey design, and the second part of the study used semi structured interviews. The survey design was an easy one to administer as it could be sent to a wide number of people, and it could be

completed at their own convenience. However response rates were quite low at first and more time was required to gain more participants. Although this design was beneficial for the first study, it was not necessarily the best vehicle to acquire detailed written responses. Therefore the second part of the study used semi-structured interviews which, unlike the survey design, gave the opportunity to probe and ask follow up questions, which was fitting with IPA, in order to ask questions around participants lived experience. This design allowed direct contact with participants. Interviews can be seen as time consuming and resource intensive, however as IPA only requires a small sample, this was not a problem in this study.

Consequently, this study used triangulation, a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources (Creswell, 2003). In particular, it refers to the application and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon. In this case, using two qualitative methods to study the Sikh community and exploring religion and spirituality and the effects it has on wellbeing and coping. The strengths of having multiple methods in this study means that disadvantages of certain methods can be neutralized (Jick, 1979). For example, IPA only focuses on a particular subset whereas thematic analysis allows analysis of an entire dataset. Greene and Caracelli (1997) also state that mixing different methods can strengthen a study and social phenomena, such as in this study, is so complex that different kinds of methods are required to understand such complexities.

The two qualitative methodologies will be explored further in each individual chapters (chapter 3 & 4) and a rationale given for why these particular ones were used and not any other qualitative method.

2.5. Ethical Considerations across both studies

Prior to the commencement of research, participants were not recruited or contacted until a research proposal was accepted by The University of Wolverhampton School of Applied Science (SAS) student management board (Appendix 1). Ethics approval was sought and gained by The University of Wolverhampton Behavioural Sciences Ethics Committee (BSEC) (Appendix 2). As participants were not contacted as NHS representatives, NHS ethics approval was not required.

Participants were then approached through recruitment letters (see Appendix 4). The interviews were carried out outside participants' working hours. Prior to taking the interviews or surveys, participants were presented with a consent form, informing them of their right to withdraw at any point (see Appendix 8 & 11). It also ensured that confidentiality and anonymity were and would be respected throughout. Furthermore, participants' consent to audio-record the interviews was sought. The audio recordings and the transcriptions are being held in a secure place for two years before being destroyed. The researcher made sure that information that might lead to identification of an individual was removed from transcripts.

It was ensured that potential harm or risk to the participant was minimised. For example, participants were informed of the study and that it may require asking

sensitive questions about their understanding and experience of religion and spirituality, as well as their stresses in their life that may cause potential distress. Participants were informed that they do not need to answer all the questions asked if they felt uncomfortable or found the questions difficult to ask. If they were particularly going through a stressful period, they were advised not to take part. It was stressed that the interview was not an alternative therapeutic treatment from the outset of recruitment.

In line with the Code of Human Research Ethic document (2010), the following ethical principles were considered throughout the research. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research to which they were being invited to participate and asked to consent to the study before taking part (informed consent) (see Appendix 8 & 11) Participants were given opportunities to ask questions prior to taking part in the study. They were also informed of how this information was to be stored and assured that participants would not be identified to ensure confidentiality throughout the study and in further publications. Participants were particularly informed (via information sheet, see Appendix 7 & 10) that all information provided would remain anonymous and be kept securely in a locked cabinet that was not publically accessible. They were also assured that pseudonyms would be used to ensure confidentiality throughout the study and in further publications and signed consent forms would be stored separately from the transcripts. However they were also informed that the anonymous questionnaires may need to be made available to examiners and supervisors of this research upon request. This study ensured that pseudonyms were used if the discussion was related to individual participants to ensure confidentiality. The participants were informed of their

right to withdraw or modify their consent at any time (no time limit was given) and to ask for the destruction of all or part of the data that they have contributed (Code of Human Ethics, 2010).

The participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time and that they did not have to reply to any questions that they were not comfortable with before the interview. If any sign of distress was detected at the interview stage, the participant was offered either a break or an opportunity to go through some relaxation techniques. They were also offered to discontinue with the interview if necessary. Fortunately this did not occur in this research study, only two participants in the interview study had requested for the interview to be briefly stopped in order to gather their thoughts or when they were a little anxious.

2.6. Reflexivity

It is important to note that, although the bottom-up approach was used, all qualitative analysis will carry an interpretative facet. I am aware that being a Sikh myself could pose a potential researcher bias (Chenail, 2011) and this was acknowledged. It is therefore essential that I position myself so that the reader may judge the extent to which my experience may have influenced my analysis and the themes chosen. My experience prior to entering the counselling profession has been within the NHS as an Assistant Psychologist and Counsellor. I have worked across all ages and in different trusts in multicultural societies.

The research topic, specifically regarding the conceptualisation of religion, was a favourable one being a member of the same religion. My assumptions were that as I am someone from the same religion, participants will be more open to

talk freely without hesitation. However, before the commencement of this research, I had quite definite and strong beliefs about my version of what Sikhism and spirituality was, evolving from my own personal experiences as well as from my personal and significant life events. As the research evolved and I talked with many who were interested, I realised that my view and another's of the same topic was very different. For example, some did not always follow all parts of the guidance set out by the Sikh religion, even if they were committed to their religion. Each had their own levels of commitment and understanding on their unique journeys. This gave me the awareness that my own values and beliefs could shape the data especially in terms of how I interpret the data. This unexpected discrepancy actually broadened my own understanding of how fellow Sikhs approach religion. They were not as rigid in their beliefs as I initially perceived or expected them to be.

The way in which I attempted to overcome this was to journal my own personal values and beliefs in order to be able to then distinguish my own beliefs from those of the participants. It helped me to be less of a therapist (which I was more inclined to do) when interviewing, and more of an objective interviewer. Additionally having supervision and showing my own analyses to my supervisors gave me an objective view of my interpretations, and when required, a gentle nudge to write in my journal. Writing in my journal was really just half the journey; it was important for me to incorporate my learning to everyday life and become more self-aware of my own personal beliefs and the effects they can have on others (please see chapter six for further reflections). Analysing the data made me review my own conceptualisation of religion and spirituality. My own view was challenged by the data as I had my own personal

experiences of the Sikh religion and had quite strong views about what Sikhism was and how I felt it was perceived. I expected others to have quite similar views especially in terms of spirituality and the community of Sikhs. However whilst conducting the research and collating data, I came across many individuals with differing views due to having different experiences within the Sikh community, as well as their own set of personal experiences. I have learnt that, regardless of being in the same religion, I do not know everything about my religion, and that the religion is only experienced by each individual through their own lens or perceptions. To maintain objectivity in my data, themes were discussed and validated with supervisors and reflected upon at a later date.

CHAPTER 3: Study 1

The aim of this chapter is to examine how religion and spirituality are defined from a Sikh perspective. In an attempt to explore a broader range of viewpoints, the questionnaire study was designed to gather more information regarding the definition of religion and spirituality of all ages and backgrounds.

Consequently, this part of the research focuses on the participants' definition of religion and spirituality by inviting them to respond to a short questionnaire with open questions. Thematic analysis was adopted to qualitatively explore the views of the Sikh community. This particular method allows for flexibility in the choice of theoretical framework. Some other methods of analysis are closely tied to specific theories, but thematic analysis can be used with any theory chosen. Through this flexibility, thematic analysis allows for a rich, detailed and complex description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.1. Justification for Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis is a qualitative method that is used to attempt to make sense of experiences or phenomena and the meanings people bring to them. Thematic analysis in particular focuses on identifying and describing ideas (both implicit and explicit) within a set of data and identify forming themes which arise organically within that data set. Thematic analysis was utilised as it was a widely used qualitative analytic method (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001) with the benefit of flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which is beneficial when capturing the experiences of others such as in this study.

Thematic Analysis was used to identify and analyse themes that presented within the participants' written responses. Although it is recognised that thematic analysis is "poorly demarcated" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 2, 28) and also seen as a method not as sophisticated as other forms of analysis such as IPA or grounded theory, however after further experience of the method and validation from other researchers (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Frith & Gleeson, 2004), it can provide insightful interpretations. As Braun and Clarke (2006) have stated "thematic analysis is a flexible approach that can be used across a range of epistemologies and research questions" (p. 28) and would therefore be suitable to not only answer the research questions in this study but also complement and fit in with using another qualitative approach, such as IPA, in the second part of the study.

In addition, it is a more suitable approach for the questionnaire study compared to grounded theory and discourse analysis, which appear to require quite detailed theoretical and scientific knowledge to be acquired from the data. Thematic analysis does not require such detailed knowledge and theory from the data and is a more coherent form of analysis for this study. This study does not need to explore or analyse the language used by the participants such as discourse analysis as this would not give sound knowledge of the Sikh participants' experience of wellbeing. Additionally, a theory does not need to be constructed using the analysis of data to understand, such as in grounded theory, as this would not capture the phenomena or sense of meaning from participants. This particular method will allow for flexibility in the choice of theoretical framework. Through this flexibility, thematic analysis allows for rich,

detailed and complex description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which is valued in this study to as it allows the flexibility to be used with IPA.

3.1.1. Participants

56 UK based Sikh participants took part in study 1. There were 23 (41%) males and 33 females (58%) of the Sikh faith with ages ranging from 17-62 years of age, with an average age of 31 years. They were mostly of British birth (89%); other countries of birth included India, Columbia and Ireland.

Table 1 shows that the majority of the participants were in the age range between 20-39 years (80%) most having acquired either an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. The distribution between the genders was mostly even except for more females in their 20s. Attempt was made to recruit others from different age groups, however responses from them were quite low.

32 (57%) participants completed the questionnaire by hand, social media such as Facebook and surveymonkey.com were used to acquire further 24 (43%) participants. Participants on Facebook who were interested in taking part were given the surveymonkey.com link to complete the questionnaire.

The online sample differed in age to the paper and pencil sample; participants in their 20s and 30s tended to complete the questionnaire online whereas the paper copies were completed by participants of a wider age range.

Table 1: A table representing demographics of the data set

		LEVEL OF EDUCATION						TOTALS
			G.C.S.E.'S and below	A- level	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Blank	
AGE	16 >	F	0	2	1	0	0	3
		M	0	1	1	0	0	2
	20's (20-29)	F	1	0	8	6	0	15
		M	0	3	2	3	0	8
	30's (30-39)	F	0	0	9	3	0	12
		M	0	1	5	4	0	10
	40's (40-49)	F	0	0	0	0	0	0
		M	0	0	0	0	0	0
	50's (50-59)	F	2	0	0	1	0	3
		M	0	0	0	1	1	2
	60's (60-69)	F	0	0	0	0	0	0
		M	0	1	0	0	0	1
	TOTALS		3	8	26	18	1	56

3.1.2. Design and Materials

A questionnaire was designed to capture further information within the population of Sikhs from all ages and backgrounds. The questionnaire was informed by Zinnbauer et al. (1997) study where various professional and religious backgrounds took part and were required to write down their own definitions of religiousness and spirituality. This study focused solely on the Sikh

religion and concentrated on the variables salient to the research aims. Consequently, the first part of the questionnaire asked about demographics of participants, particularly focused on their age, sex, level of education and whether they were born in the UK or not. The level of education and whether participants were born in the UK was explored as the participants in their 50's or above could have possibly migrated from India and may have had a different level of education. It was therefore important to capture this data to establish whether this had an influence. The second part of the questionnaire explored their definitions of religion and spirituality (please see Appendix 3). This format was verified and validated with the supervisor and Behavioural Science Ethics Committee (see Appendix 2 for the letter for ethics clearance). The study catered for non-English speaking individuals by stating that they could be assisted to fill in the questionnaire with the researcher or a member of their family. The researcher was not approached to assist with completing the questionnaire. The online questionnaire was in English, therefore targeted the English speaking population.

3.1.3. Procedure

Participant recruitment was not sought until the research and ethical proposal was accepted by The University of Wolverhampton School of Applied Science (SAS) student management board and granted by The University of Wolverhampton Behavioural Sciences Ethics Committee (BSEC) (Appendix 2).

After ethical approval was granted, 5-6 local Sikh temples were contacted via a letter (Appendix 4) requesting permission to conduct this research on their premises as well as permission to put up posters (Appendix 5). All Sikh temples

were happy for this to happen. A message was put up on Sikh Forums and social media such as Facebook (Appendix 6) requesting participants to take part in the study.

Paper & Pencil data collection

Participants who were seen in person were invited to their local Sikh temple and asked to read the information sheet (Appendix 7). Once they agreed to the study, they were asked to complete a consent form (Appendix 8). These were kept separately for anonymity. If more than one participant attended, they were asked to sit separately to complete the questionnaire. These were subsequently electronically transcribed.

Electronic means of data collection

Participants who were contacted via the Sikh Forum and wanted to take part were emailed the information sheet. Once they had read the information sheet and agreed to take part in the study, they were emailed the questionnaire to fill in and send back. Once returned, consent forms were kept separate for anonymity. On Facebook and surveymonkey.com, information sheets were a part of the questionnaire and required to answer first with no names. It was added that, as there was no space to sign, clicking on to the next stage assumed they were happy to take part. Written comments on the hard copy were subsequently transcribed.

3.2. Method of Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) step by step guide has been used for conducting the Thematic Analysis. An inductive or 'bottom up' approach was used allowing the

data to evolve through the coding process, therefore allowing themes to be strongly linked to the data rather than a pre-existing theoretical frame.

Phase 1: Familiarise myself with the data

The researcher familiarised with the data by 'repeated reading' in an active way (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to look for patterns. Notes were made for initial ideas and potential codes assigned if possible. These were completed on an Excel spreadsheet.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

After familiarisation of the data and with some initial ideas, the entire data set was systematically examined, giving attention to each participant's response to form initial codes on the Excel spreadsheet.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

After the codes were identified and coded, they were collated. These codes were focused on to create or find themes - the interpretative analysis - with attention given to analysing codes in a way that allows for finding an overarching theme. A thematic grid/map was created to show this. The grid was designed to not give each theme any hierarchical value, therefore the first theme does not indicate that it was the most common theme.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

There were two levels to this phase. The first part looked at the devised set of themes that were refined and created into a thematic grid. The second part

checked to see whether the themes were meaningful and clear with identifiable distinctions against the collated codes and entire data set. This was not clear when initially undertaken as the data seemed just be descriptive rather than analytical, and therefore the data set was coded again (see coding 2 on the excel spreadsheet).

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Analysis was continued to refine each of the themes providing clearer definitions that created an overall story. These were then checked and validated with the research supervisor with experience of the method.

3.2.1. What will count as a Theme?

In line with thematic analysis, a theme was one that related to the research question and captured an important element of the qualitative data. Therefore a sentence, or a few sentences, within the transcribed data that gave insight to how the Sikh participants described the meaning they ascribed to spirituality and religion, and any reference they gave related to dealing with stresses and their mental wellbeing, was categorised as a theme. No rigid rules were followed to allow flexibility while endeavouring to be as consistent as possible.

Although there is a researcher interest in the research area of being a Sikh (please see reflexivity section), a flexibility in allowing the data to evolve through the coding process was adopted, therefore allowing themes to be strongly linked to the data rather than to a pre-existing theoretical frame. Subsequently an inductive or 'bottom up' (see Frith & Gleeson, 2004) approach was used.

It is noted that a researcher cannot be completely free of their own analytical preconceptions, or their own theoretical or epistemological commitments, and this will be further explored in the reflexivity section. The themes were interpreted and identified at a latent level, meaning they were considered at an interpretative level, attempting to examine the underlying ideas or assumptions if possible.

Themes within each individual questionnaire were identified and predominant themes were captured. Once all individual themes for the questionnaire were complete, the themes were collated to create subthemes that were representative of the whole data set. This meant that the data was re-read several times to ensure that themes were reviewed and refined to build a 'thematic map' from the captured data. This completed the questionnaire study. Braun and Clarke's (2006) step by step guide has been used for the Thematic Analysis.

3.3. Results & Discussion

The data gathered generated two overarching themes, 'Self and society/external world', which was from the participants' feedback of their meanings of religion and 'Self and the internal world' which was from the participants' response to the question regarding their meanings of spirituality. The two overarching themes with their meta-themes and sub-themes will be considered individually. It was observed that there were more incomplete forms collated online than hand written ones.

In relation to the overarching theme 'Self and society/external world', three main themes arose when participants defined their idea of religion. These themes related to the participant's meaning or purpose of life, the way they coped with difficult times using guidance from their religion, as well as how religion can divide people.

In relation to 'self and the internal world', three main themes arose from the participants' written comments to questions about spirituality. The themes were linked to participant's connection to God, the relationship they had with themselves to increase self-awareness, and the benefits they received from spirituality. Within both overarching themes, a section to include items that did not match any of the themes has been included in the miscellaneous section for readers to view.

The following section introduces the first overarching theme, Self and society/external world, and explains how it emerges through the different sub-themes within the questionnaire study.

3.3.2. Self and Society/External World

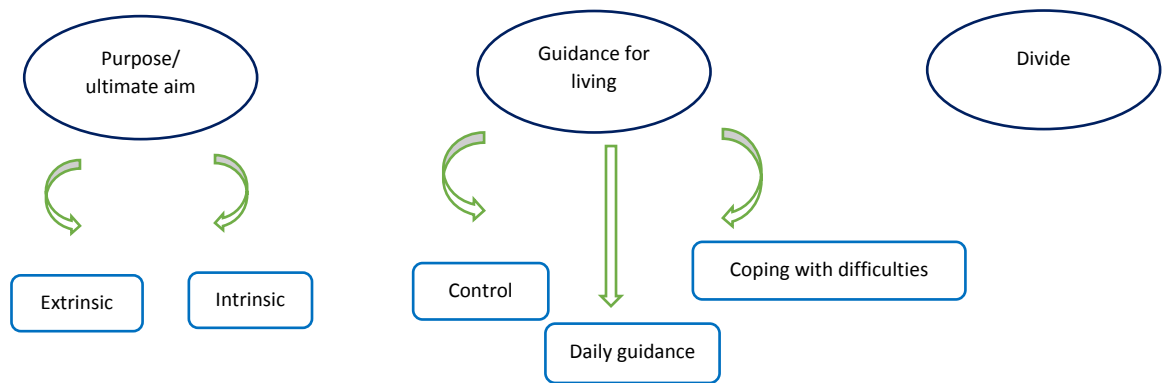
This overarching theme, 'Self and society/external world' relates to the concept of social identity. Social identity is a concept that refers to an individual's self-concept within a relevant society or social group (Jenkins, 2004). Belonging to a particular group is known to give a person a sense of belonging to the social world. Religion seems to offer a form of social identity, a "distinctive 'sacred' worldview and 'eternal' group membership, unmatched by identification with other social groups" (Ysseldyk et al., 2010, p. 60).

Another important feature of this theme observes that participants' definition of religion is very much linked to an external locus of control, in which there is a belief that outside forces are responsible for what happens in their lives and therefore external practices such as rituals, praying and following the rules and regulations of religion needs to take place in order to counteract the difficulties participants are exposed to in life.

Within social psychology there is a consensus that our own behaviour can be influenced as a result of the presence of others with regards to certain conditions, for example, the way in which our thoughts, feelings, intentions and goals are constructed has an influence on how we interact with each other in our social world.

Three main themes evolved from the 'self and society/external world'. The first theme, 'purpose/ultimate aim' was subcategorised as two sub themes, 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic' self. This section appeared to capture participant' reasoning as to why religion was important to them and the purpose it had in their lives both on an external and internal level. The second theme, 'guidance for living' was subcategorised into three sub-themes, 'coping with difficulties' and 'daily guidance' and 'control'. The focus in this section encapsulated participants' views of how religion helped them in difficult times and how it provided guidance in how to live their life in general, and incorporated participant' negative stance. The last main theme 'divide' looked at the view that religion is a man-made construct that divides people.

Figure 1: Model showing the themes for Self and Society



The three themes (‘Purpose/ultimate aim’, ‘guidance for living’ and ‘divide’) each have their own sub-themes. These three meta-themes generated the overarching theme of ‘Self and society/external world as they were related to the way in which participants made sense and meaning of their social world and social identity. The way in which they made sense of the social world was by their own connection externally from themselves. For example, the guidance from the religion helped some cope with life’s difficulties and gave others guidance for daily living to stay centred. Some sought comfort from others of the same faith whereas others felt this was unhelpful.

The following section introduces the first meta-theme, ‘Purpose/Ultimate Aim’ and the two sub-themes in relation to the meta-theme, ‘extrinsic’ and ‘intrinsic’.

3.3.2.1. Purpose/Ultimate Aim

The purpose/ultimate aim theme relates to the consensus that religion provided a purpose in an individual’s life and a sense of an ultimate goal. This theme emerged from participants who reported that religion gave them purpose and meaning as being either intrinsic (more about connection with the inner self,

self-identity and awareness) or extrinsic (concepts outside of themselves such as tools, guidance and paths) or both.

3.3.2.1.1. Extrinsic:

Throughout the responses, there was a sense that religion provided them knowledge regarding the purpose of life and a reason to be in the world. The reasons were generally quite similar; a guide or path to connect to a higher power/God or becoming one with God. For example,

"A path you wish to follow to take you close to God" (line 2, Female, 31)

"Way of life" (line 4, F, 33; line 5, F, 28; line 12, Male, 17; line 17, F, 22)

"A pathway/guide to show you the right way to reach God." (line 7, F, 28)

"..Central to the definition is a belief in an entity outside human existence that is the reason for the presence of the universe and everything in it." (line 54, M, 21-29).

The above are a few examples of the types of responses from participants which highlighted the use of religion to create meaning; it helped them form a sense of meaning and a way of being, giving them a sense of the universe and their place in it. It was interesting to observe that participants had diverse names to refer to God. For example, 'Entity', 'Higher power', 'Higher being', 'Superior being', 'Supreme Being', 'Divine power'. These diverse names seemed to be mostly from the age bracket of 20-36 undergraduates or participants with a Masters. Interestingly, although a few participants in their 50's took part in the study, they simply referred to their conception of the Divine as simply 'God' and gave simpler responses by comparison.

"Way of life. Tools to connect with God. I love being Sikh. Gives me purpose and meaning to life. Gives me a path (true) I can follow." (line 26, M, 59)

This particular participant was almost appreciative of the religion, seeming quite optimistic (e.g., 'I love being Sikh') and accepting of what religion provided in terms of the purpose. They seemed to have a clear idea of how religion helped them in their life, describing it as giving them 'tools' and 'a path' as well as a sense of purpose and meaning. This confirms Hattie, Myers and Sweeney (2004) findings that individuals who have a purpose or direction in life as well as optimism and hope, are less likely to be at risk for both mental and physical illness. This particular participant has identified aspects of his religion that provide him with a set of "tools", as he described them, tools which have a positive impact on his physical and mental wellbeing. Furthermore, Steger and Frazier (2005) found that the sense of grasping the meaning of life facilitated the positive relations between religiosity and psychological health suggesting that a sense of purpose to life through religion is linked to positive functioning. This participant clearly identified these tools and "being a Sikh" as providing a sense of meaning and purpose. Other participants in the same age bracket responded with,

"Believing in something that you find peace in." (line 20, M, 62) or *"It's all about your beliefs."* (line 18, F, 58)

Participants over the age of 50 appeared to give broader and affirming responses such as the above, which touched upon an idea of having this sense of peace and happiness or it all being more about belief than just religion. This was slightly different to how the 20-30 year old participants' worded their

responses who described religion in terms of a guide to life, that is, how to live and structure one's day-to-day life.

3.3.2.1.2. *Intrinsic*

A number of participants implied that the main purpose or aim of religion was connection with the inner self, forming a self-identity and to provide knowledge and guidance in developing a deeper reflection or awareness. Participants who described obtaining this self-identity as a Sikh through this self-reflection and awareness seemed to have a more reflective attitude towards life in general which enabled them to better deal with problems they encountered in a positive way. This seemed to correlate with Saini's (2014) findings who reported that participants who were described as having a strong psychological identity as being Sikh also reported higher life satisfaction.

"A guide to developing and nurturing knowledge and experience of your true self and true being...With a growing deeper understanding of who and what we really are through serving and meditating...." (line 41, M, 39)

"A tool that can be used to realise the oneness or one's spiritual aspirations." (line 25, F, 28)

Although there was a recognition amongst a few participants that religion provided an inner sense of meaning, this was mostly true of younger participants (ages 21-39 years). Although these participants saw religion as an internal process, they all still had their own personal views of how religion gave them an inner sense of meaning. The above examples appeared to express this internal experience as having the knowledge or tools to find one's own 'true self' or 'oneness' in the same way Rogers (1969) talked about self-actualising and reaching your full potential. On the other hand the participant below expressed

this internal experience as having faith in a spiritual guide and it becoming a part of her own sense of identity, and identity that is uncertain.

“...Religion for me is also my spiritual guide. And that is because of my 'belief' in it. Yet this belief is both strong and fickle. Strong in that it is not something I think I could ever let go of, because it becomes my sense of identity, but fickle because my faith is not constant - it fluctuates with my circumstances. And in many ways that is the tragedy of religion - it can become your entire identity and define your person, yet you will still question certain aspects and certain events despite your 'faith'.” (line 34, F, 21-29)

This poses an interesting question in whether the Sikh identity is the same as the Sikh religion and how much these two may overlap. Religion can be seen as bigger than an individual identity. Participants in their late 40's and 50s on the other hand, seemed to be much more interested in peace and inner contentment; a need that they found provided in their religion. The participants in their 20s and 30s looked at religion as helping with their goal to reach God, and possibly peace and inner contentment. They both overlap as they all have an identity that comes from religion. Erikson (1959) proposed a theory of psychosocial development which comprised of eight stages from infancy to adulthood. In his view, at each stage an individual experiences a psychosocial crisis which resulted in a positive or negative outcome that affected personality development. Participants in the age range 20-30 would be classed at being at stage 6 (Young adult, 18-40 years old) where the psychosocial crisis is regarding Intimacy vs Isolation. This means that at this stage relationships with others are explored and with considerable importance placed on those relationships leading to a commitment. Being successful in such a stage means that you have a happy relationship and feel safe and secure within them. Participants in their 20s and 30s still have this need to connect more with the

social world and others whereas the participants in their 40s and 50s may have already formed these relationships and feel safe and secure. In Erikson's (1959) psychosocial model, the 40s and 50s age range would be at stage 7 (Middle adulthood, 40-65 years old) where careers are established and they have a stable relationship and begin a family, developing a sense of being a part of the bigger picture.

The next section introduces the second meta-theme, 'Guidance for living' and its three sub-themes: 'coping with difficulties', 'daily guidance' and 'control'.

3.3.2.2. *Guidance for living*

This meta-theme emerged as a result of participants expressing the notion that religion provided values and principles as well as a particular way or guide that incorporated rules and structure in order to establish a way of living in society or the social world. The Sikh religion prohibits the use of alcohol and substances as well as harming oneself at any time, a way of coping in times of stressful or challenging times. Smith et al. (2003) reported that some religions prohibit the use of intoxicants such as alcohol, therefore substance abuse could be less likely with this group. Subsequently, comorbid conditions (i.e., depression) could also be less likely. Eskin (2004) and Huguelet et al. (2009) found that religious people may be protected from risky behaviour such as suicide as this would be classed as sacrilegious.

3.3.2.2.1. *Coping with Difficulties*

A number of participants described religion as providing solace at times where life became more challenging and difficult. There was a general sense from participants that religion provided useful tools such as prayer, seeking comfort from others of the same faith, as well as rules and advice that could be turned to in times of conflict. A couple of participants expressed this viewpoint:

"The morals and ethics in religion give me a way of coping in life. For example, if life gets really hard, I pray and meditate more which gives me clarity about what to do next. When life gets too much, I have faith that God will help me sort my problems out. Also in my religion, congregation is important, and I regularly meet with others who are of the same religion. This is important to me as there is a saying that says you become the people you are with. And also in tough times we are a source of support for each other" (line 39, F, 30-39)

"It would have a set of "rule" by which those following would adhere to and turn to for advice and in times of conflict (internal or in society) would reflect on these rules to carry on in their lives." (line 53, F, 21-29)

There was recognition that at times of conflict, support from others or the 'congregation', especially of the same religion, was just as important as tools such as meditation. There seemed to be a faith and trust that God would resolve these problems if they adhered to the guidance or 'rules' provided. Park and Slattery (2013) stated that benign religious beliefs can protect people against the daily wear and tear of stressors as well as helping them face highly stressful or traumatic situations. Another comment from a male participant of similar age had a similar view in what a challenging situation could be.

"Religion I feel, helps the weak of mind and lost, by providing a strict way of living." (line, 45, M, 32)

This participant seemed to suggest that difficulties were as a result of a being 'weak' or being 'lost' in mind, and that the guidance and rules provided by

religion assisted in remedying this state of mind and allowed them to take charge of the mind. Research suggests that the guidance religion in general offers may lead to better mental health outcomes (Park & Slattery, 2013). For example, the guidelines or rules prescribed in religion tend to assist in avoiding problematic or challenging behaviours and instead encourage adopting healthier lifestyles.

3.3.2.2.2. *Daily guidance*

This sub-theme is comprised of participant' views of how religion provided daily guidance. For them this daily guidance manifested through having a belief or faith system with rules, practices and values which centred on a supreme being/God/Higher. This also provided guidance in living within society with morals and ethical values:

"A set of beliefs and values that believe in a God. Ceremonies and customs are followed to pray." (line 27, F, 35)

"I would define religion as the path you follow in life. Religion makes up your moral and ethical values in life." (line 9, F, 31)

"....It is a guidebook on the does and don'ts of life...." (line 34, F, 21-29)

A common religious practice that emerged from the responses was that of prayer. According to Ladd and Spilka (2013) the nature of prayer varies considerably across individuals. Masters and Speilman (2007) have discussed this further, reporting that some types of praying have led to feelings of peace and support whereas other types may cause further distress. Ellison et al. (2009) as well as Beadshaw et al. (2008) brought this to light by discussing the idea that people that had a poor image of God seemed to have poorer mental health hence the influence of prayer on a person's wellbeing.

An interesting observation to note with participants' responses within this theme is that participants did not cover specific tools used such as prayer and meditation. Participants did discuss the different tools that Sikhism provided, however discussion was focused more on rules and guidance on how to live within society. For example,

"It's a way to guide you through how to live, what choices to make/not make – obviously depending on how much you believe in it." (line 8, F, 30)

"Its rules that help you guide your way through life as well as help you live in a harmonious society." (line 10, F, 27)

Perhaps further exploration with these participants by interviewing them would have led to what specific rules and guides they followed that contributed to their way of living and coping with life's demands. Interestingly, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (1979) can explain the social relationships and world around a developing person and how it affects their development, bringing about changes to systems in their surroundings. This research's approach to religion is influenced by an individual's age, gender and culture. An individual is affected by everything in their surrounding environment. In this case the guidance of religion to the way of life can be seen as more top down and external focused. In other words, the culture of the religion and its guidance affects the individual. Each participant is at the centre of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model interacting directly with the people in the different microsystems and the effects of the interaction also goes both ways affecting each other.

3.3.2.2.3. Control

The majority of the negative views of religion expressed by the participants revolved around the concept that it was a way of controlling the world or the population usually by a higher being or God or by a person in a position of higher authority:

"I do not believe 'Religion' has a meaningful definition and is rather a man-made construct to keep a sense of control in the world." (line 30, F, 18)

"Religion is a man-made word to control order in this world. I would call it faith. My definition of faith is that believing in the supreme power that control all organisms of life in the universe." (line 32, M, 29)

"I would define Religion as an organised institution, a predefined set of constructs created to control a population." (line 45, M, 32)

"Set of rules and ideals used to control people in numbers, yet unique to each individual that claims it due to interpretation." (line 49, M, 21-29)

Interestingly the statements made by participants with regards to religion being a way of controlling others were predominantly from males of a similar age group. Gender differences in religion have been generally understudied, however Nelson, Cheek and Au (1985) reported that men were seen as more competitive than women especially in terms of status, prestige and dominance and therefore were expected to conceptualise God in terms of power and dominance. A definition of control is intimately related to issues of power and dominance, which might suggest why more males in this study saw religion as a way of controlling others.

3.3.2.3. Divide

Although there were participants who may have found support from their social religious circles, especially in times of conflict, there were others who appeared

to focus on religion as a means of dividing people or leading to intergroup discrimination/conflict. For example,

“One religion should not be calling itself superior to others, as all are valid which allow others to practice any religion freely without being a hindrance to individuals of other religions.” (line 53, F, 21-29)

“I believe religion is more socially constructed, therefore if one follows a religion, one is frowned upon if they choose not to abide by certain traditions or norms set by the specific religion” (line 51, F, 21-29)

Exline (2002) stated that negative interactions within religious social circles can include disapproval, criticism, and even excessive demands which would be distressing to an individual. In the above statements, there seemed to be a sense that some religious people may apply religious belief in a narrow and limiting way, and this was felt as excessively judgemental and critical by these participants. There has been further research to suggest that negative interactions can cause higher levels of depression and lower levels of well-being (Krause, Ellison, & Wulf, 1998) as well as lower levels of self-esteem (Krause, 2003).

Other participants mentioned that in their opinion religion appeared to divide and separate people into different groups rather than pulling them together, another apparent negative aspect of religion:

“Religion is a word that has come to classify different groups. I would regard myself as a spiritual being.” (line 6,M, 32)

“Religion is what separates different people into categories. It’s almost a group you belong to, can identify with..” (line 8, F, 30)

"Religion is a way of guidance to achieve spirituality. In my opinion the word 'Religion' divides people. The reality is that we are all one." (line 29, F, 29)

Following a particular religion can unfortunately divide people and it can be the price an individual pays to get that sense of belonging. The above participants were all from the UK, where some areas would be classed as highly diverse multicultural exposing others to different religions and cultures, but there are some areas where this is not apparent, which can make some feel quite segregated and isolated (see Amin, 2002). An interesting perception expressed in the quotes above is that there exists this notion of separation of themselves or identity, either identifying them as belonging to themselves ('I would regard myself as a spiritual being') or belonging or identifying themselves to a particular group ('It's almost a group.') or a bigger group ('The reality is that we are all one'). Furthermore, the differentiation between oneness above all religions, or belonging through identifying oneself with a particular religion was another noteworthy perception.

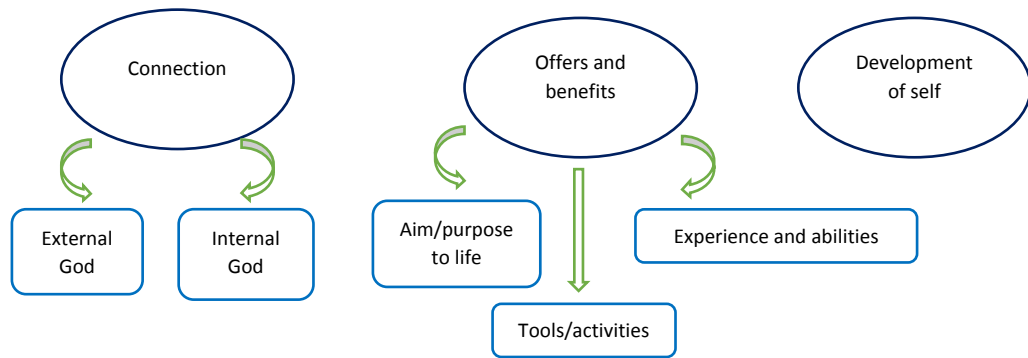
In summary religion gave participants a purpose or meaning either through connection with their inner selves or concepts outside of themselves such as a path or guidance. The guidance, values and principles that incorporated rules and structure in the religion determined a way of living in the social world that enabled coping with the difficulties or general daily life. Support from others of the same religion was seen as helpful by some and unhelpful by others because it may have raised issues of being rejected by a group for "not following the rules".

The next section introduces the second overarching theme, 'Self and the internal world', and explains how it emerges through the different sub-themes within the questionnaire study.

3.3.3. Self and the Universe/Internal World

Participants' definition of spirituality created this overarching theme. The definitions provided by participants with regards to spirituality very much linked to an internal locus of control (Rogers, 1951), where there is a belief that they are themselves responsible for their own actions and determine how they live their life, how they feel, and that they can control the way they behave in society – a strong sense of self-efficacy. The development of self theme appeared to be a common theme throughout, akin to self-actualisation in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) where one is motivated to seek self-fulfilment and self-growth and having an awareness that this is within their own control and not just outside forces. Maslow proposed a five tier model of human needs where people are motivated to achieve specific needs. The first two basic needs, such as physiological and safety needs, are required externally from the individual. Each stage needs to be met and fulfilled before moving on to the next stage. The next two needs are classed as psychological needs such as belongingness and love needs as well as esteem needs. These are also met externally from the individual. The final stage is seen as the self-fulfilment need such as self-actualisation. Self-actualisation is achieving one's full potential and concentrated on an individual's internal world. Consequently this overarching theme was called self and the universe/ internal world.

Figure 2 : Model showing the themes for Self and the Universe.



‘Self and the internal world’ is more about inward exploration and the striving for a special connection to God, to a greater sense of meaning bringing about changes in the individual’s sense of wellbeing as well as their interaction with others (i.e., spreading love). Consequently, in the overarching theme self and the universe, three main themes arose (see Figure 2). The first main theme, ‘connection’ (e.g., a feeling or belonging to a group or person) was subcategorised as ‘internal God’ and ‘external God’, as participants responded in terms of connection: a God outside of themselves or one within them (i.e., God or the soul). The second theme, ‘relationship to self’ was not sub categorised. This theme summarised participants’ views on how spirituality has helped develop the individual personally as well as enabled them to become more self-aware. The last theme, ‘offers/benefits’ was sub categorised into three themes: ‘aim/purpose to life’ (the why), ‘tools/activities’ (the how) and lastly ‘experience/abilities’ (the what).

The following section presents the first meta-theme, ‘connection’, in how spirituality was defined.

3.3.3.1. Connection

Participants in this study defined spirituality in terms of connectedness (i.e., a feeling or belonging) either as to an internal God or an external God. Literature

has suggested that positive mental health is related to having a positive relationship with God, including subjective feelings of closeness to God and God's role in their daily lives (Badshaw, Ellison, & Flannelly, 2008; Ellison & Fan, 2008). Some participants in this study largely discussed God in quite positive and receptive language. It was unclear whether they had positive mental health without having explored further.

3.3.3.1.1. Internal and External God

There was a perception that the connection to the soul or inner self was also seen as the same as connection to God. This perception seemed to predominantly be held by the females in the early 20s to late 30s in this sample. For example:

'It's how much you are able to connect with your own soul or God.' (line 9, F, 31)

'Connecting to a higher force/power/inner self' (line 23, F, 25)

They seemed to have an intuitive appreciation of God as being an internal locus or internal connection. Perhaps females in this sample posed this view as typically women are associated as being more in touch with their emotions and feelings, and express engagement with their internal world more often than men. Interestingly a study by Cox (1967) and Nelson, Cheek and Au (1985) found that men more than women compete with one another for status, prestige, and dominance, therefore they might be expected to conceptualise God with respect to dimensions such as power and dominance.

On the other hand, connection to an external conception of Deity was also quite prevalent. This was described as a connection to a higher force or God and the

idea of spirituality meaning connecting to the universe, to the world, nature and other people. Although there was still mention of a God in this theme, it was not as common in the first main theme and was split between an internal or external God. There was mention of the soul and the inner self used more than God, and a knowledge of the external being outside of the person. For example:

'It is the experience of connecting to a higher source of energy, through any medium, whether it through world nature, other people, music or meditation.' (line 35, M, 26)

In this quote, the participant experienced God as outside of himself in terms of connection to others and nature. Interestingly, both males and females talked about this connection with their own soul (internal) and the world (external) in the same light. There was an understanding or maybe an integration of everything being connected to each other, God, Soul and the world that appeared to be void of the trappings of a specific religion. Here, there seemed to be an understanding of this power being universal, an almost unity with all (Wolfe, 2002) which seemed different to the definition of religion in that the focus was more about a particular group of people belonging to that religion. Spirituality was recognised as an extension of their own environment.

The next section introduces the second meta-theme, Development of Self.

3.3.3.2. Development of Self

The 'development of self' theme is comprised of the growth and enhancement of an individual. Erikson (1959) had suggested although an individual goes through many stages throughout their life, that there is still opportunity for continued growth and development throughout one's life. Many participants

perceived spirituality as inextricably linked to the development of the self in terms of personal development, an inner belief, knowledge and investigation of themselves to connect with and be in tune with their internal world and, through this, to understand their external world. This theme came up quite frequently when the participants discussed their notion of spirituality. Although definitions of religion had aspects related to the self, it was not as obvious as the definitions given of spirituality (in the overarching theme 'Self and the Universe'). Many participants described spirituality as connecting to their inner self or a 'looking within'. For example,

Spirituality is your inner belief. It's a strength that helps you believe and trust in things you cannot see or hear. (line 10, F, 27)

'When you get in touch with your inner self. Finding peace within.' (line 19, F, 26)

'I believe Spirituality is Religion of The Self. A method by which One may become to understand Oneself, usually through meditation and knowledge. Where Religion instructs One how to conduct oneself outwardly, I feel Spirituality focuses inwards on the Soul entity.' (line 45, M, 32)

'...the only way to understand yourself is to look within. When you unravel what is within...the outer reality changes to reflect the awakening of the inner knowledge you gain through first-hand experience...' (line 41, M, 30)

'...Looking deep within, searching for where you belong or where you should be.' (line 36, M, 20)

Spirituality was used as a means to self-discovery by 'going within' and allowing themselves to act more effectively in the world because they are connected to their own needs and desires. Connecting to themselves allowed them to connect to the external world. One person went on to say that developing the true self created changes in the external world and another differentiated between religion as a code of conduct and spirituality as looking inwards to

develop the connection to self. This seemed similar to Maslow's (1962) notion of self-actualisation where an individual is attempting to achieve one's full potential.

'Your relationship between your inner self and the universe.' (line, 46, F, 28)

'Realising our own consciousness and developing our spiritual state which impacts on how we see the world and each other.' (line, 48, M, 35)

'To look deep within one self to find positive energy, to develop oneself to spread love/ share love.' (line 14, F, 57)

'A deeper understanding of self and others and the world.' (line 27, F, 35)

A couple of participants discussed how spirituality assisted them to understand their deepest self as well as understanding others. For them it was a vehicle for clarity and sharing, to perceive things as they truly are without any judgements clouding their perception. Interestingly, only one participant (aged 57) in the above quote explicitly linked this inner understanding to developing positive energy such as love, which can be spread to others. Another participant did mention 'others' in her definition, however in a different manner,

'Listen to your heart, that's it. Whatever the people of the world do, they do for themselves. We do for ourselves so stay happy and carry on.' (line 31, F, 51)

This participant recognised the need and desire for self-knowledge for oneself rather than sharing and, for her, others were also on this same almost self-interested journey. Her main intention was to 'listen to [her] heart' allowing her to connect with her true needs, to have access to a secure base from which she can act without anxiety but instead with happiness. This security allowed her to

be part of the world without having her own needs and desires drowned out by other people.

A few participants made reference to the soul and their relationship to this as a way of self-development. For example,

'One's relationship with the Soul, which is subsequently defined as the essence of the human. Therefore, this relationship stretches to the investigation of the self.' (line 28, M, 31)

'To become self-aware of our soul - conscious and always strive to connect with the one, whilst shunning emotional distractions or vices' (line, 38, M, 32)

Spiritual pursuits were equated with a deepening of the relationship with the self, identifying the Soul as quintessentially human part of them striving to become aware of it, similar to Rogers' theory of self-actualisation (1959). Spirituality was used as a vehicle to increase consciousness and stability. Having this strong and stable core self gave them tools to act more surely, consciously and mindfully. One associated it as personal development as a way to be closer to God, *'Personal development to get closer to God.'* (line 13, M, 33) while another mentioned self-development as a means to a path to individuation..

'Spirituality in my mind pertains to the spiritual journey an individual takes to self-developments. It is not limited to any experience but is a unique path specific to an individual.' (line 34, F, 25)

This participant saw the journey as a personal discovery that is unique to every person. As shown in the above comments, there were many related to the development of the self and a sense of learning from within to make sense of the world. This inner experience of spiritual and religious feelings has been

known to be an integral part of the everyday lives of many individuals (Martin & Colucci, 2008).

The next section introduces the third meta-theme, 'Offers/benefits' and the three sub-themes in relation to this meta-theme, 'Aim/Purpose to life', 'tools/activities' and 'experience/abilities'.

3.3.3.3. Offers/Benefits

This theme is connected to the positive aspects of spirituality in terms of what aspects of life participants felt it helped them with. In this case, participants described the benefits as an aim or purpose to life (why), tools (how) and experience/abilities (what) gained.

3.3.3.3.1. Aim/Purpose to life

Similarly to the definition of religion, participants mentioned that spirituality helped them to realise their own purpose and meaning in life, echoing Frankl's notion that the primary human motive in life is an individual's need to actively find meaning and value in life (1969). The consensus in the first overarching theme is that, from the perspective of religion, it gave participants a quite particular knowledge of the meaning of their life (generally to reach God), whereas within the theme of 'aim/purpose to life', there is a consensus that when you have achieved spirituality, you have a realisation of your ultimate aim.

'...By taking Amrit your actually born into the Khalsa Panth (spiritual birth) until then in terms of spirituality your not born. Only then can you really start taking steps to be reunited with Vaheguru; which as Sikhs we believe is the ultimate goal/purpose in life.' (line 17, F, 22)

'Spirituality is the journey of ultimate love, finding truth and contentment.' (line 37, F, 31)

'...To develop a sense of being and to realise our true purpose in life.' (line 39, M, 32)

The above participants expressed the spiritual journey as a way of facilitating the realisation of their true purpose in life, as either to be united with God or as discovering 'the truth'. Interestingly, there were a couple of participants, a small minority, who believed spirituality could be achieved independent of religion (not just Sikhism):

'I believe no matter what religion we are, we are all connected and spirituality is something that connects us all that want a bigger meaning to our life.' (line 39, F, 35)

'....Spirituality is the ultimate goal....A person can become a spiritual person through realisation of themselves and their purpose in life without having lived a religious life.' (line 34, F, 25)

Wuthnow (2007) and Smith and Snell (2009) had reported that a small minority of people classed themselves as 'spiritual and not religious' in their studies. There seemed to be an openness to other religions and a sense of humanity connecting us all together, rather than just the society or community within the Sikh religion with these participants. Oser, Scarlett and Butcher (2006) remarked that a small percentage of exclusively spiritual young people may have a resource for spiritual development that is quite powerful. This may be because more thought was devoted to such issues than those who were reported as religious and spiritual or non-spiritual and non-religious. It came across that religion was almost like a foundation or platform forming an identity for the person from which they could then experience growth ultimately leading

to spirituality. Religion seemed to be a stage where one accumulated knowledge and guidance as well boundaries and ethical values. With spirituality, that stage was not necessarily required and a more free, open and spontaneous stage existed. Similar to a previous theme, participants who were older, held a more positive and affirming view regarding spirituality and its meaning to life...

'It gives you light in life and hope in life.' (line 20, M, 62)

For them spirituality benefited them in terms of offering a faith or confidence in their life providing a guiding light offering hope and support.

3.3.3.3.2. *Tools/Activities*

Participants mentioned ways in which they engaged in spirituality as a means to cleanse their mind and soul, predominantly via meditation or prayer and the seeking and obtainment of knowledge. Chopko and Schwartz (2009) suggest that adopting contemplative and meditative practices have shown to decrease emotional reactivity. This was interesting as prayers and meditation was not discussed or talked about in terms of being a tool in participants' definitions of religion. Prayers and meditation was discussed more when participants were defining spirituality.

'Activities you undertake to cleanse the mind and soul whilst focusing on God.'
(line 2, F, 31)

The above participant mentioned 'activities' that cleanse the mind and soul without specifying particular activities. There were many participants who mentioned meditation or praying as being the main tool they use..

'Spirituality is using naam simran (meditation) to become one with God.' (line 4, F, 33)

'.....through meditation, service of others or prayer.' (line 9, F, 31)

'Meditating and having a free mind.' (line 11, F, 19)

'This is your connection to God which is done through meditation - single pointedly.' (line 26, M, 59)

Wuthnow (2007) provided an explanation for why participants used meditation and saw this as a part of spiritual practice, rather than a religious one. He distinguished spiritual seeking from spiritual practice. In his view, spiritual seeking was seen as superficial and spiritual practice required more of a commitment to make one's self present to the transcendent dimension. According to Wuthnow (2007), spiritual practice could include meditation and prayer. Poloma and Gallup (1991) claimed that prayer's importance is largely due to its "improving a sense of well-being" (p. 5). Jackson and Bergeman (2011) also mentioned that prayer and worship correlate positively with personal control which leads to improved well-being. Other participants recognised that meditation was important to develop this deeper understanding of the self, however there were other ways too:

'A deeper understanding of self and others and the world. Can be explored through meditation and philosophical readings.' (line 27, F, 35).

'To become one with god by focussing the mind through worship and devotion.' (line 40, F, 30)

These participants recognised alternative ways spirituality provided a way to understand themselves, helping them to achieve their goals: through knowledge from philosophical texts and sheer commitment.

3.3.3.3.3. *Experience & Abilities*

This theme was created as many participants described how spirituality assisted in experiencing this peace or inner belief or connection to the soul void of any notion of God or a higher being. This almost suggested that spirituality was a deeper knowledge or knowing of self and a possible recognition of having this power within themselves rather than it being something outside of themselves. Although many of the responses were connected to the self, a separate theme for experience was created to illustrate what spirituality particularly provided.

A couple of participants mentioned an inner peace and contentment as an experience arising from spirituality:

'...Bringing you peace and lasting sense of happiness.' (line 29, F, 29)

'...Reaching a place of eternal bliss through meditation, finding peace in one and whatever is around you. Also giving you super human powers.' (line 32, M, 29)

This state of peace and inner contentment comes from spiritual pursuits, which had an apparent benefit in daily life. Lo (2011) mentioned that spiritual well-being has come to be regarded as a psychological outcome indicating the extent to which individuals are at peace with themselves, feel their lives have meaning and purpose, and derive comfort from their beliefs in the face of suffering. Participants expressed a sense of eternal happiness or 'bliss' within themselves as well as their surroundings. Interestingly one participant mentioned acquiring 'super human powers', some form of super abilities, which was not discussed further.

As well as experiencing this peace and contentment, other participants experienced the benefits in terms of mystical experiences a type of profound emotional and mental states that connect the self with something larger, although still identified with the self. For example:

'.....experiencing the one light within you which is God.' (line 4, F, 33)

'The experience and being of the truth - the oneness of the universe and beyond - unending.' (line 25, F, 28)

Spiritual experiences are like little windows of opportunity, light, bliss, contentment, euphoria, longing, grief (veeragh) that are universal and limitless.' (line 34, F, 25)

'An OBE type of experience. Where you feel physically connected.' (line 50, F, 21)

Participants mentioned a union within themselves, also seen as God. There was an acknowledgement that it was something within rather than an external being, an inner experience, with something that is eternal and intrinsically “true”, “being the truth” suggesting the eternal and the self are connected. Another participant experienced deep and profound emotional experiences, such as euphoria, longing and grief that linked the self to something eternal. Martin and Colucci (2008) mentioned that the inner experience of spiritual and religious feelings has been known to be an integral part of the everyday lives of many individuals. The participants' definition seemed to overlap with Martin and Colucci's (2008) definition where their inner experience was an important aspect of their lives benefiting them in term of light, bliss and contentment.

3.4. Conclusion

The aim of the study one was to offer the researcher insight into the meanings of religion and spirituality within a Sikh Community from all ages. From the results two overarching themes were found.

The first overarching theme 'Self and the external world' was also classed as 'Self and society'. This was shaped by participants' view of religion, and was linked quite loosely to their external locus of control. This overarching theme related to how the social or external world related to social identity when religion was defined by the participants. This theme can be explained, in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) terms as a top down process whereby our approach to religion is influenced by the person's age, gender and culture. The responses within this theme were centred on religion providing guidance and tools to achieve goals, and to provide values and principles that incorporated rules and structure in order to establish a way of living in society or the social world. Interestingly, there was scant discussion on the inner self and self-identity and, although meditation and prayer were mentioned as tools, only a few participants expressed this idea. A few participants observed that religion provided others a way of controlling the world and dividing or separating people, rather than uniting them.

The second overarching theme 'Self and the internal world' was also classed as 'Self and Universe'. This theme looked at the self in relation to the universe, a broader concept than the just the social world. This theme related to the internal world, and the definitions provided by participants with regards to spirituality very much linked to an internal locus of control (Rogers, 1951). Themes of self-development, an inner connectedness to self and others appeared to be a

common thread throughout this overarching theme echoing notions akin to the self-actualisation described in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954). There was a perception that the connection to the soul or inner self was seen as equivalent to a connection with God. Such a sense of connection, including subjective feelings of closeness to God, and God's role in daily life has been suggested to relate to positive mental wellbeing (Ellison & Fan, 2008; Badshaw et al., 2008). There was an understanding or intuition that everything was connected to each other - God, Soul and the world - that appeared to be unconnected to the external trappings of religion. There was an understanding that this power was universal, which seemed to be at contrast to the previous overarching theme in which religion was defined. Interestingly participants mentioned the different tools used such as meditation, devotion and prayer within the theme of spirituality a great deal more. Both these overarching themes were to a degree linked in terms of an emphasis on self-development.

The distribution between the genders was mostly even except for more females in their 20s. The majority of the participants were in the age range between 20-39 years (80%) most having acquired an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. Attempt was made to engage older participants, where English may not have been their first language. This was acquired by having paper copies (although in English) provided to them however some participants were helped in filling this in by the researcher or a member of their family. It was decided to keep the questionnaire in English as the Punjabi language did not have certain key words that are available in English, for example, there did not seem to be a word that adequately distinguished the word spirituality from religion, and when others were asked in general about their own definitions in Punjabi, each had

their own unique ideas about what this might be. Therefore it was more suitable for them to fill the questionnaire in with their own family members who may share common words or phrases. Not many participants over the age of 40 took part in the study, and this could be as a result of the way in which the study was conducted. For example, to recruit more participants, the questionnaire was also made available online, where predominantly participants in their 20s and 30s took part, possibly indicating that this age accessed social media more than the participants over the age of 40 and above. Although attempt was made to recruit others from different age groups, responses from them were quite low, even whilst using the different media to recruit participants. Participants were predominantly from the UK, where there is access to education of which the 20 and 30 years olds may have been a part. The over 40s may have come from other countries other than the UK which would mean a different educational history as well as cultural differences.

In this sample, Sikhism differed to other religions in its concept of the development of self in their external/social world as well as their internal world. This is a concept that is important in therapy for self-awareness. In general there were many similarities as well as differences in the Sikh people's definition of spirituality and religion, which seemed to vary by their age, gender and educational background. Participants over the age of 50 appeared to generally provide broader and affirming responses to describe religion and spirituality and used terms such as having a sense of peace and happiness. It is acknowledged that the over 50s was a small sample, therefore caution was taken when making generalisations in this study. However the 20-30 year olds described religion in terms of a guide to life and how to live and structure one's

day-to-day life. Females in this age group appeared to have the perception that the connection to the soul or inner self was seen as identical to a connection with God. Subsequently, this age group (20-30 year old) will be further explored in the next study.

In addition, it was also recognised that although participants mentioned that religion was helpful to them in times when it was particularly challenging or stressful, there were not many references to state how specifically religion assisted and whether there were any specific tools used such as prayer and meditation. This was predominantly only mentioned when discussing spirituality. However the definitions of religion offered by the participants seemed to focus on the rules and guidance in how to live within society. It was acknowledged that the extent to which religious rules and guidance contribute to the participants' way of living and coping with demands in life needs to be further explored. It is hope that study two will shed more light on this. The subsequent study will therefore focus on the age group (20-30 year olds) to dive deeper and explore their life through religion and spirituality.

CHAPTER 4: Study 2

The main aim of this research is to explore the personal experience of Sikhs and their personal perceptions of religion and spirituality to explore whether this had an effect on their wellbeing and ability to deal with stresses. Study one (questionnaire study) used the thematic analysis approach to offer insight into the meanings of religion and spirituality within a Sikh Community from all ages. Study one had speculated that the older age group appeared more accepting of their religion and spirituality, suggesting that they may be less occupied by a quest to explore their life through religion and spirituality than the 20-30 year old age group. Subsequently, to examine this further study two will focus only on the younger age group (20-30 year old) and explore more closely their personal experience and perceptions of religion and spirituality as well as the effect on wellbeing. This age group will be explored to dive deeper using interviews as a means to explore their life through religion and spirituality and the extent to which religious rules and guidance contribute to their way of living and coping with demands in life.

Due to the interviews undertaken and transcribed, the qualitative method Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed. This particular method will allow for exploration in detail of how participants make sense of their personal and social world and attempts to explore their personal experience. As IPA is concerned with an individual's view of the world, it therefore enables in-depth questions about lived experience to be answered (Willig, 2001).

4.1. Justification for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

As the study aimed to explore the personal experiences of Sikhs and their personal perceptions of religion and spirituality, the qualitative method Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed. IPA is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself (Smith & Osbourne, 2007). IPA is appreciated as an interpretative model using what is known as "double hermeneutic" in which the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their own experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The IPA method was compared to other qualitative methods to determine whether IPA was a better fit for this part of the study. Grounded theory was rejected as it is predominantly used to construct theory and to build a theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2001) being more of a sociological approach (Willig, 2003), based on several stages of analysis of large primary data. IPA was considered more appropriate for this study as it can be used to examine a single case in a more psychological and detailed way capturing a more personal experience (Smith et al., 2009) more in line with the research focus of this study. Grounded theory appears to apply purposive sampling to come up with a universal theory, whereas IPA works with a homogenous sample to find similarity and difference. Grounded theory uses the results of each interview to guide the next, whereas IPA attempts to treat each respondent the same. Treating each respondent the same was important in this study as it was valuable to explore the personal experience of each Sikh individual and their own personal perception or account

of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself (Smith & Osbourne, 2007). As Conrad (1987) states, it's about getting an 'insider's perspective' and getting close to the personal world or lived experience of a participant. Consequently, IPA was considered a better fit for this study.

IPA also specifically focuses on the phenomenological experiences of the subject, unlike other methods such as Discourse Analysis, which focuses on dialogue. Discourse Analysis can be applied to any form of written or spoken language, such as a conversation or a newspaper article. The main topic of interest is the underlying social structures, which may be assumed or played out within the conversation or text. This study leans more towards a phenomenological experience and is more of an inquiry of Sikh individual's experience with regard to a phenomenon (their religion and spirituality with regards to wellbeing) and how they might interpret these experiences, therefore IPA was determined to be more suitable.

Smith (2008) mentions that to analyse how participants perceive and make sense of things, there are a number of ways to obtain data for an IPA study such as personal accounts, diaries, etc., however the way most IPA studies have been conducted is through semi-structured interviews. Therefore to investigate the research question for this part of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted.

IPA is idiographic in nature, unlike other methods, which is to say that it provides data about the unique and subjective experiences of the individual

participants involved in a study as well as revealing particular cultural phenomena that may be unique to that community. Although this study focused on Sikh individuals who were mainly based in the West Midlands, it was recognised that this could not be generalised to the larger group of Sikhs in West Midlands or outside of this. Consequently, IPA was valued as an approach to address this studies research questions as its main intention is to arrive at general claims carefully after each individual case is carefully examined and to avoid making generalisations about larger groups (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). As such, IPA was determined to be the better methodology for this study as it enabled an in-depth study of individual participants' responses to the questionnaires and to determine particulars from the data that may apply to the larger Sikh community whilst minimising the influence of researcher bias.

4.1.1. Participants

This part of the study looked more closely at the 20-30 year old age group. Therefore, in line with the IPA methodology, a small well-defined sample of six people (4 males and 2 females) in the Sikh faith (therefore an opportunity sample), who have been practicing their religion for at least 2-3 years between the ages of 20-30 were invited to participate in the interviews. These participants did not necessarily take part in study one. IPA usually tries to find a fairly homogenous sample therefore the homogeneity of this sample was defined by the participants' dedication to their chosen faith (practicing for at least 2-3 years and baptised Sikhs) and by their shared living environment in the West Midlands. All participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Table 2 provides demographics of participants

Table 2: A table representing demographics of the data set using pseudonyms.

Participant	Gender	Age	How long they practiced religion
1. 'Harinder'	Female	29	12 years
2. 'Inderjit'	Male	26	11 years
3. 'Sandeep'	Male	24	11 years
4. 'Pritam'	Male	27	27 years
5. 'Kiran'	Female	29	6 years
6. Balwinder	Male	26	7 years

4.1.2. Materials

As IPA is concerned with exploration and in-depth questions, a semi-structured interview schedule/approach was designed as opposed to a structured interview.

A structured interview had not been adopted as it would deliberately limit what the respondent can talk about, and discourage or miss out on a novel aspect of the subject. It was deemed that the semi-structured interview would facilitate greater flexibility of coverage and allow the interview to go into novel areas and therefore produce richer data.

The schedule of the semi-structured interview was verified and validated with the supervisors and by the Behavioural Science Ethics Committee. The interview schedule was informed by the first study in terms of its questions. There was an indication that religion and spirituality helped participants to

manage and cope with struggles and demands in life. Therefore, it was important for the interview schedule to address these aspects. The interview schedule was divided into three sections to provide a general outline. The first section explored the participant's perceptions of religion and spirituality. The second section explored participants' lived experience of religion and its impact on well-being, and the third section explored the participants lived experience of spirituality and the impact on well-being. A mixture of open and closed questions were adopted in the semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 9). Questions and prompts used neutral language in order to allow for further exploring with the participants. For example for the questions around religion prompts such as 'how would you define it?' 'What does religion mean to you?' 'How does religion impact your life?' 'What are the advantages and disadvantages of religion?' were used.

With permission from the participants, all interviews were audio recorded. The interview schedule was flexible to give the participant time to think and speak. No specific time frame for interviews was adopted; however 45 minutes to an hour-and-a-half was expected. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw or modify their consent at any time and to ask for the destruction of all or part of the data that they have contributed (Code of Human Ethics, 2010; BPS Code of Human Ethic, 2014).

4.1.3. Procedure

Participant recruitment was not sought until the research and ethical proposal was accepted by The University of Wolverhampton School of Applied Science

(SAS) student management board and granted by The University of Wolverhampton Behavioural Sciences Ethics Committee (BSEC) (Appendix 2).

After ethical approval was granted, 5-6 local Sikh temples were contacted via a letter (Appendix 4) requesting permission to conduct this research on their premises as well as permission to put up posters (Appendix 5). All Sikh temples were happy for this to happen. As well as posters, an email or message was put up on Sikh Forums and social media such as Facebook (Appendix 6) requesting for participation in the study.

Participants who were interested to take part contacted the researcher via email and they were briefed about the content of the study and sent an information sheet (Appendix 10) and consent form (Appendix 11). Once they agreed to take part, arrangements were made to interview them individually in a room at a local Sikh Centre, or in a Sikh temple in their area if available. This was to ensure they felt comfortable and safe in familiar surroundings. All participants were requested to sign the consent form and bring it with them to the interview.

4.2. Method of Analysis

Each interview was transcribed verbatim by the researcher before further analysis of the data. An idiographic approach to analysis was adopted, where the transcript for the first interview was looked at in detail before moving on to the other transcripts. Smith et al. (2009) recommendations for IPA analysis were employed. The transcripts were read a number of times to become familiar with the data. The left hand margin was used to make initial notes on initial thoughts and the right hand margin was used to document emerging themes

from the transcript. Initial comments were made focusing on three types of process where possible:

- a) Descriptive comments – a description of the content
- b) Linguistic comments – exploration of specific language used
- c) Conceptual comments – analytical and interpretative examination of the content

Attempt was made to transform the initial notes and transcript into themes that captured a higher level of abstraction and, at the same time, transforming this into concise phrases that encapsulated the fundamental characteristic of the text. Where possible, psychological terminology was used if appropriate. The first two interviews with initial notes and emerging themes were validated and verified by in-depth discussions with research supervisors.

Once all transcripts had been analysed and themes generated, these themes were listed together to look at connections between them. The themes were listed in chronological order to ensure that the sequence within which the theme came up remained. These were then clustered together as ordinate and subordinate themes. Following the emergence of master themes, these were then checked by re-reading the transcripts to ensure that the connections made were indeed from the primary source and using the actual words of participants. From this, a table of themes was produced (please see Appendix 12). The cluster of themes captured participants' concerns most strongly. Phrases were used to illustrate the theme from each participant where possible. These were then translated into a table with master themes (please see Appendix 13).

Table 3: A table representing the superordinate and subordinate themes.

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes
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Religion and spiritual struggles – some degree of internal conflict	<i>None</i>
Religion and spirituality assisted with the development of self and identity	Guided by others or society
	Guided by religion/spiritual principles
Spiritual strivings	<i>None</i>
An aid to wellbeing – religion/spiritual coping	Religion rituals as tools
	Sikh philosophical perspectives as guides

4.3. Results and Discussion

This section will present the emergent themes from the interviews of the participants in the 20-30 year old age group to address the aims of the study.

Through the process of analysing the transcripts, four superordinate themes were found. These were, Religious and spiritual struggles – some degree of internal conflict, Religion and spirituality assisted with the development of self or identity, Spiritual strivings, and lastly, Religious/Spiritual Coping as an aid to wellbeing. The themes appeared to represent a journey, beginning with an internal conflict, which initiated a process of learning more about themselves and who they are with regards to their strivings and motivations. This experience assisted with ways of coping with their struggles in daily life and stresses with the use of aids to enhance their wellbeing. The aids to wellbeing theme, although not as profound as the other themes, was still included to describe the different tools used by the participants.

All participants shared similar views in that religion and spirituality either should be linked or are interlinked in some way. Even though one or two participants felt that they saw them as separate and distinct, they still felt the two worked hand in hand.

4.3.1. Interpretative idiographic analysis

Before embarking on the main themes, it is important to get a sense of the participants involved, to give context and offer insights into the participant before reading the main themes that emerged. All names have been changed for confidentiality purposes and an overall story for each participant was generated.

4.3.1.1. Harinder – ‘Developing her identity’

Harinder is a twenty-nine year old female who has been practicing the Sikh religion for 15-26 years, however she classed herself as practicing for 12 years, since she was baptised. In Harinder’s view, her commitment to Sikhism started when she was baptised. Harinder was consistent throughout her interview that religion and spirituality should be classed *as alike*.

Harinder made reference to her family and upbringing throughout the interview. She mentioned that her mum was also a baptised Sikh, whereas her dad was not. It appeared that she was not fond of religion in her early years but as she grew up she found religion to be a source of solace. Interestingly, Harinder seemed to have found religion *on her own* at the age of 16, a time where she mentioned her difficulties also started.

As a person and throughout the interview process, Harinder was well engaged. However she did seem to require reassurance from the interviewer in the first half of the interview. Harinder came across as quite insightful regarding her own difficulties and had mentioned that she has self-awareness that comes from her

upbringing and education. The interview appeared to capture Harinder's internal and external conflict and her developing self. This will be discussed later.

4.3.1.2. Inderjit – 'Inner resolve'

Inderjit is a twenty-six year old male who has been a baptised Sikh for eleven years, although he regards himself as having been a Sikh all his life. Inderjit made a clear distinction between being a baptised committed Sikh and just being raised as a Sikh from birth. Inderjit became more interested in becoming baptised and knowing more about being a Sikh when he was in his teens. Inderjit's stance on religion and spirituality was that they were 'intertwined' and this 'integrated' notion remained throughout the interview.

Inderjit had mentioned that whilst growing up, his family were not religious, and at around 10 or 11 years old he went to Punjabi school and befriended a group of religious friends. His teenage years appeared to be a pivotal time for change in terms of search for his own identity and his place in the world, which is a situation common to the lives of most adolescents regardless of their religion and cultural backgrounds (Marcia, 1980). His friends and family seemed to play an important role in this time helping him with his wellbeing. Both parents followed the Sikh way of life and they became more religious together as a family during his adolescent time. In general, Inderjit expressed quite positive language regarding his life and religion, such as 'gratefulness' and 'appreciation' and expressed a general happiness and feeling of contentment with life in his view. Inderjit saw stress as logical using numbers

to quantify his own level of stress compared to the rest of the world/population and discussed being sad as 'weird' and defined the intensity of emotions logically on a numerical scale.

As a person and throughout the interview process, Inderjit was well engaged and came across as an individual in his own right, researching the religion and seeking knowledge himself as motivated by his own competitive nature to gather knowledge and to make his own decisions, not governed by the view of his friends or family. There was a strong sense of a high internal locus of evaluation with an internal world being more important than the external world or approval.

4.3.1.3. Sandeep – *'Exercising control over his life'*

Sandeep is a twenty-four year old male who has born into the Sikh religion, however classed himself as practicing since he was eleven years old. Sandeep was a baptised Sikh although it was unclear when Sandeep was baptised. In Sandeep's view baptism did not necessarily mean committed although he believed it should. Sandeep's stance on religion and spirituality was that they were separate. However later in the interview he clarified that they also go 'hand in hand' and 'can't go without the other.' In his view, spirituality was about the connection with himself and religion provided the tools for achieving this connection.

Sandeep did not mention his upbringing or family as much as the previous participant (Inderjit), therefore the extent to which his upbringing had an effect or influenced his religion and spirituality is not clear. Sandeep's motivation and

self-belief seemed to come from the rich history of his religion, particularly the “martyrs” (people who sacrificed themselves to help others).

As a person and throughout the interview process, Sandeep was well engaged. However he did struggle, at times, with voicing his views. This was particularly the case regarding his experiences of spirituality, where there may have been confusion about whether the researcher was asking Sandeep about an actual spiritual experience. There did appear to be a good sense of internal locus of evaluation, where others’ opinions did not affect him.

4.3.1.4. Pritam – ‘Constructing his own interpretation and understanding’

Pritam is a twenty-seven year old male who has born into the Sikh religion. Pritam mentioned that he was ‘pretty committed’ to his faith, but that he did not see himself as a devout Sikh but as someone ‘trying’ to follow and practice his religion. From the beginning Pritam set the scene of a person developing but recognising that he had limitations. For example, Pritam explained that he questioned his faith as a teenager about certain traditions in his religion and throughout the interview Pritam mentioned several times that he was a ‘deep thinker’ (or just generally referred to himself as ‘being a thinker’) in order to develop his own understanding. Pritam’s stance on religion and spirituality was that they were separate. Spirituality was this connection or higher understanding of self, whereas religion was the channel for these thoughts to be implemented and acted upon. The difference with Pritam from the other participants was that his understanding of religion was a humanitarian one in that it had a civilised and compassionate core.

Pritam did mention his upbringing briefly - that his family were all Sikhs and had been all their lives – and that therefore he was brought up as a Sikh, as a family tradition. Pritam did a lot of his questioning when he was a teenager and seemed quite confident in his own abilities to come to his own conclusions about his beliefs. In his view, Sikhism was not a religion, but a way of life that had positively impacted his life.

As a person and throughout the interview process, Pritam was well engaged and came across as quite reassured, confident and laid back. He seemed comfortable in the interview and was quite confident in his opinions and conclusions.

4.3.1.5. Kiran – ‘Religion and spirituality saved her’

Kiran is a twenty-nine year old female who has been practising Sikhism for six years and was very committed to her religion. She explained she was from a Sikh family and was born into Sikhism. However, she was not born in to a deeply devoted religious or deeply committed family. She ‘found’ Sikhism in her early 20s when she felt there was a ‘hole’ in her life and she started to ask questions and learn more about her faith. She made a distinction between her life before this as non-practising versus her practising life at present, which she described as two very different worlds. Her world in her practising life was more of a spiritual one. Kiran mentioned her upbringing in parts: her father had a drinking problem and subsequently she also learnt to cope with her stress by using alcohol, a more self-destructive way of managing in her view.

Kiran's stance on religion and spirituality was that they are the same or seen as interlinked. Kiran saw religion as a guide for spirituality, helping her to become a more spiritual being. She recognised that there were other guides, such as philosophical books that also could help with being more spiritual. However, she chose the Sikh way of life as her main way guiding her spirituality.

As a person and throughout the interview process, Kiran seemed quite engaged and very open about her thoughts and feelings. There was a sense that Kiran was on a journey of self-discovery, uncovering secrets or hidden depths within herself, as indicated by her thirst for personal development or spiritual development.

4.3.1.6. Balwinder – 'Identifying himself through connection and controlling thoughts'

Balwinder is a twenty-six year old male who has been practising his faith for seven years. Balwinder classed himself as fairly committed to his faith, and observed that he had made a 'pledge' to follow his faith for the rest of his life.

Balwinder's stance on religion and spirituality was that they were separate but intertwined. He kept this stance throughout the interview, stating that they both worked alongside each other. For him spirituality seemed to be something that was experienced, and more practical, and religion just the theory. This gave the notion of being at a university where you are given the tools and theory behind the study or work but then you have to use these tools/theories to understand for yourself. Religion, for him, gave him direction when times were hard whereas spirituality gave him the boost of energy to move forward.

Balwinder did mention parts of his upbringing and how religion came to him at the right time when he was growing up. Balwinder also divulged personal information about himself, saying how he felt 'lost' most of his life and that there was something 'missing'. He found religion through social contact with people who lived near to him. He did pursue or look at other religions as a way of making sure Sikhism was the right path for him. However, he also admitted it was an easier transition due to being in a Sikh household. Balwinder seemed to be motivated by his desire to be loved and having a connection with others. It was interesting that Balwinder had divulged that his main stresses before baptism were related to relationships and his uncontrollable thoughts as a teenager or young adult, and having religion and spirituality in his life as being helpful in these areas.

As a person and throughout the interview process, Balwinder was well engaged, and there was the impression that he was quite open about his personal experiences and was comfortable to share his journey.

4.3.2. Superordinate theme 1: Religious and spiritual struggles – some degree of internal conflict

It is recognised that although spiritual and religious beliefs can provide a sense of security (Kirkpatrick, 2005) and meaning, however it can also be a locus of struggle (Exline & Rose, 2005; Pargament, 2007). Most of the participants went through their own unique struggles (external or internal) predominantly during adolescence. Interestingly, Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) found that the greatest change in development of coping appeared from middle childhood to adolescence. These religious and spiritual struggles were moralistic (e.g.,

issues around intoxicants) or finding meaning (e.g., feeling lost, understanding loss). Each participant used their lived experience of religion or spirituality in a distinctive way to manage their way through these difficulties. Some used it as a way of controlling 'out of control' feelings or gaining greater control of emotional states. Others used religion and spirituality as a way to accept a larger plan by the divine and their place in it, or finding that missing piece in their life. All went through a process of internal conflict and came to their own conclusions.

Both Kiran and Harinder were very open about their own struggles regarding drinking as a way of coping with stress during adolescence or prior to making a commitment to Sikhism. Harinder's struggles began when she was a teenager, however Kiran's struggles came a little later, in her early adult life (in her 20s). Harinder mentioned '*I want to go out and go drinking or what not.*' (line 55) and Kiran stated that '*before I was practising, my way of dealing with stress was anger, so losing my temper or just drinking*' (line 22). Both declared that religion prohibited them from doing this as alcohol is forbidden by the rules and teachings of the religion. Since they were baptised, both were devoted to their religion and its teaching of self-discipline and self-control. Harinder and Kiran made reference to the bigger stresses in life. In Harinder's case this was her father being ill as well as her own internal pressures and the external pressure of others. In Kiran's case it was her father's drinking problem.

Harinder believed that religion acted as a centring force that allowed her to keep her emotional equilibrium in very trying circumstances. When she felt that things were out of control and she had nothing to rely on, religion and her connection

to God became an emotional centre from which she could achieve a sense of balance and emotional strength:

“...my father felt ill and urm then like I said, I was out, when things are out of your control that’s when I started to turn toward religion and in doing so urm for me it was a miracle my dad got better urr when all the doctors said he wouldn’t, and I believe that was a spiritual connection between me and God then as well because urn because it was a miracle.....” (Line 109, HARINDER)

This fits in well with Hogg, Adelman and Blagg’s (2010) study on religion and uncertainty which concluded that people are more likely to turn to religious beliefs and practices in times of greater uncertainty. Harinder’s dad being ill was a great source of uncertainty for Harinder who turned to faith to reduce her anxiety and to gain solace and support in a time of considerable stress.

In Kiran’s view, similarly to Harinder’s view, Sikhism enabled her to exert greater control over her emotional states, and in particular, helped Kiran to become less aggressive and less judgemental towards herself and or others:

“..It’s helped majorly. Erm... before I was practising, my way of dealing with stress was anger, so losing my temper or just drinking. 2 things that I... there were only 2 things I knew how to deal with stress is just drink and that’s because it’s kind of like a sociable thing...” (Line 22, KIRAN)

This fit in well with Pargament, Koenig and Perez (2000) findings where they described five functions of religious coping including finding meaning to a challenging event, gaining control, gaining comfort by achieving closeness to God, increasing intimacy with God and others and aiding a life transformation. Kiran had mentioned briefly that people in her Indian culture, and her father in particular, would drink as a way of coping with stresses and problems, rather than just socially drinking; she too had used this way of coping with her stresses

and worries. It seemed that religion helped her to find better, adaptive ways to manage, and offered her a coping strategy that she did not have before. Having researched religion and spirituality, she discovered the link between her father drinking as a way of coping and her own usage of alcohol as a destructive means of coping, and subsequently acquired adaptive and proactive ways to manage her stress. The specific aspects of religion that helped her manage better is explained further in the theme 'religious coping'.

"..I think...yeah...I do remember a few times when erm... I was drinking and there would be these bigger stresses erm... and I've literally, I would just...it would just swallow me. The stress would just swallow me and I was just in a horrible dark, dark place and my environment around me started changing. I was changing it and I didn't realise. Obviously now, I've kind of got that better insight, I understand what was happening to me then, but at the time, I didn't know, I didn't know what was happening, I was just falling and I was allowing myself to fall. Erm.. you know, it was lucky that I managed to get out of that then erm.. but I'd get really, really low, really low, to the point where I like I don't really know...I didn't know whether I would actually make it through certain things.." (Line 96, KIRAN)

This is quite an emotive excerpt where Kiran talked about a difficult period of time where she lacked control over her overwhelming emotions and had no sense of direction. However she now has 'better insight' (line 96), which she attributed to her commitment to religion and spirituality and was able to come out of this phase, from which experience her new self emerged. This complements Klaassen, McDonnald and James (2006) study that religious development is linked to identity development and is most distinct within adolescence and old age. Kiran's sense of self seemed to be fairly stable and insightful after this hard journey. One of Kiran's profound insights was that as she changed her self, she felt she could '*change the world*' (line 120). She felt happier and more peaceful within herself and ended the interview mentioning

that *'it's just spreading love and spreading happiness and peace, and you know, it all starts internally.'* (line 122).

Sandeep had also talked about a particular struggle of his (in his case a bereavement). Sandeep believed in the concept of life after death; that the spirit or 'state' moves on and still exists, albeit not in physical form. Having this belief seemed to comfort Sandeep and helped him to come to terms with death when he experienced bereavement, particularly the loss of his grandmother. Flannelly, Ellison, Galek and Krause (2006) stated that having a positive view of the afterlife was strongly related to fewer reported symptoms of anxiety, depression and other psychiatric symptoms for the bereaved individual. This certainly seemed the case for Sandeep. It was interesting that Sandeep had previously discussed not having any big stresses and later mentioned what seemed like quite a significant loss the impact that this had on and a major part of his life. It could be a comparative perspective, as he has not experienced bigger stresses (in his view, a bigger stress was an illness, family or relationship break up, relationship, financial hardship etc), and the death of his grandmother is 'comparatively' a big stress for him so far.

“..Erm.. but there's one, one thing that was a major part of my life, that was the death of my gran.” (Line 74, SANDEEP)

Although Sandeep confessed that this experience had a major impact on his life, this does not necessarily have to mean that it was also indicative of a major stress, however the context of the interview suggested that it could be. There could be an element of downplaying of his feelings of the loss (see the excerpt below), and replacing this sense of loss with a religious teaching of Sikhism. Frantz, Trolley and Johl (1996) did find in their study that traditional aspects of

religion was used as a source of strength (e.g., prayer, faith in God; attendance at church, rituals) when grief was experienced, therefore this could be the case with Sandeep. However there was no further suggestion in the interview to support this interpretation. It could depend on whether stresses and loss are seen as the same concept by Sandeep. Although, in general, the loss of an elderly loved one is likely to be experienced very differently from an untimely loss of another (for example, deceased parents), Sandeep seemed to have a positive view of death from being a Sikh. Perhaps as Flannelly et al. (2006) suggested having this positive view may have helped him to feel comforted.

Sandeep: Erm.. but it didn't affect me as much as I thought it would have...

Researcher: Hmmm..

Sandeep: Erm..

Researcher: Were you quite close to..?

Sandeep: I was fairly close to her, yeah..

Researcher: Right, OK..

Sandeep: Erm.. I think the reason why I wasn't affected as I thought I would be was because erm...because we're Sikhs, it helps to erm.. it helps to .. what's the word?.. to deal with these kinds of issues.. (Line 76-82, SANDEEP)

The notion of life after death in Sikhism, as well his grandmother being spiritual, helped Sandeep manage and deal with his loss. Here he demonstrated what he discussed previously about a higher level of understanding where you trust that God knows what he is doing and that he would provide without anyone asking. Sandeep trusted that his grandmother was going to a place after death where she would still exist in some form as mentioned from the guidance of his religion. Interestingly there was no mention of heaven or hell as one would presume with regards to religion (see Segal, 2009). He was 'happy' knowing she still existed somewhere and was not in pain, and this seemed to give him solace.

Sandeep: And she was a really religious person anyway or a really spiritual person, should I say, actually, yeah, a spiritual person, contradicted myself there!

Researcher: That's alright. (Laughs)

Sandeep: (Laughs) Erm.. you could see that she was a really spiritual person so I knew where she was gonna go or erm.. she wasn't in pain or anything so erm.. because I could see her in that state and I believe that state exists, it's helped me cope with her death, erm.. I was happy for her and erm.. obviously I was upset that, in the sense that she wasn't physically here for us anymore.

Researcher: Hmmm..

Sandeep: But erm.. it was easy to accept knowing erm.. what happens, where she has probably gone after. (Line 84-88, SANDEEP)

There was acknowledgement that he was 'obviously upset' for not seeing her physically any more. However Sandeep focused more on accepting that she was gone perhaps to a better place or at least a place where he was happy for her to go. It seemed that this acceptance was even more manageable because he found a way that he still could be close to her through a commonality in meditation and prayer – also his main way of coping with stress or emotional distress. This relates with Jackson and Bergeman (2011) findings where prayer and worship helped with personal control and acceptance in Sandeep's case leading to improved well-being.

Researcher: Yeah..

Sandeep: Erm.. yeah. I think on more of a spiritual level, accepting it as well. Erm.. she did lots of meditation and prayers and things like that.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Sandeep: Erm.. to feel closer to her, it was erm.. it was.. knowing that I could do the same thing..

Researcher: Yeah..

Sandeep: ..as she did and erm.. it just kind of helped. Erm.. yeah..

Researcher: Yeah..erm.. Should I go onto the next part of the question?

Sandeep: Yeah, please. (Line 90- 96, SANDEEP)

Although Sandeep mentioned that he did not feel that the death of his grandmother affected him as much, there was a general sense of sadness and

heaviness felt in the room by the interviewer - Sandeep seemed to use 'erm' and 'yeah' more often at this point of the interview. Discussing a bereavement is understandably a very sensitive subject and it seemed Sandeep was struggling to carry on with this subject. Sandeep had gestured to move on to the next question hence the interviewer (MK) swiftly moved on to the next part. Sandeep's response 'Yeah, please' seem to reflect the gratefulness of this change of subject.

Similar to Sandeep, Pritam had also gone through a loss of his own, not a family member but someone to whom he felt very close:

Pritam: Erm.. but I have never been through it myself. But then having said that, I did have a bit of a moment where I took myself back to erm.. there was a Saint that passed away, erm.. many years ago, probably about, closer to 8 to 10 years ago, and I had no direct relationship with them, I had no erm.. real erm.. you know how sometimes you're very close to somebody?

Researcher: Yeah.

Pritam: I didn't have that connection with them.

Researcher: Hmm.

Pritam: Erm.. but when they left, erm.. I was a broken, broken kid, I just had no idea what was going on, and my world was turned upside down and I don't know why. Erm.. but I think ultimately, it's just down to the fact that I felt that those people who are here to serve us, you know spiritually, to guide us.

Researcher: Yeah.

Pritam: To teach us the ways of life and another one of them has gone. (Line 56-62, PRITAM)

Although Pritam did not have a direct relationship with the person he described, he nevertheless felt a sense of loss and grief at the death of someone he considered a type of spiritual guide, someone he looked up to as a hero figure in a religious sense. After a major loss, Jacob (1993) found that up to a third of people most directly affected will suffer detrimental effects on their physical or mental health, or both. Pritam felt the loss of connection to a sort of spiritual

father figure – someone who was a reassuring presence in the background and could be relied upon when needed.

Pritam: I think I was more upset at that erm.. but then even going through that, just generally, somebody else was saying the same thing that I said to these people that, you know, it's all in God's plan and these things are meant to happen.

Researcher: Mmm.

Pritam: And so that helped me accept it because you know, if you think about it, if somebody hadn't said that erm.. what other kind of support could somebody offer? (Line 64-66, PRITAM)

Through the support of the religious community, Pritam was able to deal with his feelings of loss and grief, as well as deal with the age old question of why “bad things happen to good people” by considering that even death can be seen as part of a larger plan set in motion by the Divine. Taylor (2007) mentioned that having this type of social support promotes mental health and buffers stress. The support from the community may have comforted Pritam and helped him to make sense of this loss.

On the other hand Balwinder had mentioned that he felt ‘lost’ (line 30) most of his life and that there was something missing. This fitted in well with Frankl's concept that the primary human motive in life is an individual's need to actively find meaning and value in life (1969). Therefore this feeling of missing ‘something’ surfaces. His main struggles before baptism were with regards to relationships and his ruminating thoughts in particular. Having religion and spirituality in his life has been helpful in these areas. Balwinder reflected on his ruminating thoughts, and there were many references with regards to his journey in controlling or managing this thinking tendency. He initially started his journey in reflecting on his university life and undertaking a mathematics course that developed his logical and rational thought.

“..When I went to university, cos I did a degree in mathematics, very logical, rational thinking, prior to that, I would kind of...I didn't look at anything logically or rationally, so I wouldn't... I wasn't very open-minded but when I developed that mind set, then I started to explore more about religion..” (Line 32, BALWINDER)

Balwinder mentioned having ‘developed a mind-set’ of being logical and rational before he explored religion however it was unclear how this was developed. There was an assumption that one might need to develop a particular ‘mind-set’ before being open to explore religion. Balwinder discussed his stresses and difficulties before finding religion.

“...taking things to heart too quickly, thinking about something longer than you really should and allowing the thought to fester in your mind until you become you know, really upset basically....” (Line 46, BALWINDER)

He described his anguish over his constant thoughts, which festered in his mind controlling his feelings. He tended to discuss this in parts throughout the interview, which could have been missed, however both Balwinder's body language within the interview, as well as the choice of words he used regarding his thoughts, indicated his struggle in this area and how important it was to him.

“Everyday, just generally waking up happy, being happy, so religion gives you something to do and that's really important for someone like me, cos I'm an over-thinker, once a thought festers, it builds, builds, builds, builds and it keeps growing and you know, I either need an answer to it or I need to understand it correctly. What Sikhism does just by daily routine, like meditation and nitnem, doing seva and going Gurughar...it kind of calms the mind a little bit and those kind of stresses go away.” (Line 60, BALWINDER)

For Balwinder religion seemed to have provided a way to manage his overthinking, something ‘really important to him’. With reference to Perez (2000) functions of religious coping, religion helped him to gain control of his thoughts. Although there were other themes talked about in great detail, there was this underlying theme of his ruminating thoughts that helped me understand

Balwinder and his struggle. In the interview, whilst talking about his ruminating thoughts, he would crease his eyebrows intensely and look almost as though he was remembering this time. He had also mentioned an existential crisis, which also included his difficulty with his thoughts.

Inderjit was the only participant in the study who did not necessarily mention a particular struggle of his own but did refer to one of his sister's struggles when she experienced complications during her pregnancy.

“You know. My whole family will tell you, erm... nothing stresses me out, exams, anything like that, I mean... I mean the only time I was stressed a little bit I think was when my sister was having erm... her kid, my nephew.” (Line 95, INDERJIT)

Interestingly, for most of the participants' religious experience became more significant during adolescence. This is a stage in which a person transitions from childhood to adulthood (13-19 years) according to Erikson's psychosocial stage theory. Erikson called this the 'Fidelity: identity vs. role confusion' stage where there is a main concern with how individuals appear to others and in which they form their own personal identity as well as sexual identity. During this stage, through intense exploration and analysis of personal goals, values and beliefs, individuals search for a sense of self that is dependent upon the outcome of their explorations. This stage can also suggest a turning point where a compromise between 'the person one has come to be' and 'the person society expects one to become' is acknowledged (Wright, 1982, p. 73) and the sense of self is re-integrated. However, if this is not achieved, Erickson states that that this can lead to role confusion, which involves the individual being unsure about their place in society. Consequently, an individual may experiment with different lifestyles (for example, work and education, etc.). Pressure from others to adopt a certain lifestyle or be a certain way can create a negative identity and thus

result in an individual having feelings of unhappiness. This correlates with Krause, Ellison and Wulf (1998) who have suggested that negative interactions can cause higher levels of depression and lower levels of well-being. Subsequently, in relation to this theme, it is understandable that a degree of conflict can occur in religious and spiritual matters at this stage. This conflict can be viewed as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) which is where we seek consistency in our beliefs and attitudes in any situation where two cognitions are inconsistent. For example, a state of tension (i.e., cognitive dissonance) results when there is a divergence of the many cognitions we hold about the world and ourselves where they may clash.

4.3.3. Superordinate theme 2: Religion and spirituality assisted with the development of self or identity

The development of self appeared comparable to self-actualisation in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) where one is motivated to seek self-fulfilment and self-growth. Similarly, Erikson (1959) had implied that an individual goes through many stages throughout their life earning the opportunity for continued growth and development throughout their life. All participants mentioned being born into a Sikh family or household, although not all necessarily subscribed to religious beliefs or commitment at this first instance. Having this knowledge gives insight into the foundation point where they then began their development of self and/or their identity within their faith. Most participants stated that they were committed to religion once they were baptised.

All participants' journeys through their religious life, although guided by others or by religious/spiritual principles, was very individual. The common thread was that they were on a journey of self-discovery. Consequently, this main theme generated two sub-ordinate themes, 'guided by others' or 'society and guided by religious/spiritual principles'.

4.3.3.1 Guided by others or society

This sub-theme was developed as a result of many of the participants indicating how part or most of their identity was guided by the relationships they had with others. Religion seemed to offer a form of social identity, an 'eternal' group membership, unmatched by identification with other social groups" (Ysseldyk et al., 2010, p. 60). For some, this meant the general society, for others it meant the Sikh community specifically. Not all participants stated clearly what they meant by society therefore no assumption was made and the theme included 'others' to represent this. Hood, Hill and Spilka (2009) mention that people seek meaning about their place in the social world through connections to others and social roles.

Both Harinder and Balwinder discussed how others had an effect on their own personal identity or identity as a Sikh. Harinder was clear that these 'others' were society and in her view society was the 'community of Sikhs' (line 163). Balwinder discussed these 'others' as religious people, not making it necessarily clear whether these were Sikhs in particular or religious people in general.

Harinder had mentioned on several occasions that at the beginning she felt society was quite restrictive.

“..Yeah, originally yeah, originally religion to me I felt was like a it was constricting me, stopping me to being what I wanted to be and then eventually ..but that's just my perception of religion, what other people told me what religion was and what I saw people showed me what religion was....” (Line 47, HARINDER)

There seemed to be a realisation that her restrictive feelings were actually her own perception of what the community or society said about religion. At first she took the viewpoints of others (external locus of evaluation) to define her meaning of religion and spirituality, which did not seem to fit with her own sense of self. This feeling of restriction may have motivated her to find her own meaning (internal locus of evaluation) by doing her own research. The result of such a shift in locus of evaluation and interpretation seemed a better fit to her own sense of self and this restored her confidence in her own opinions of Sikhism. A further example of this process occurred when there was another conflict with regards to societal expectation and her sense of place within it. Harinder had mentioned that ‘when I’m in society I have to behave a certain way for a religious person’ (line 51). If Harinder saw society as the religious circle then Exline (2002) had stated that negative interactions within religious social circles could be distressing to an individual. What Harinder perceived as others’ expectation of her as a practicing Sikh restricted her sense of being, almost like she could not formulate and practice Sikhism according to her own understanding. Originally there seemed to be an over reliance or dependence on society to shape her views on Sikhism, however it seemed that she later started to question and then reject others’ ideas of Sikhism and moving on to formulate her own individual path in the religion or locus of evaluation (Rogers,1980).

At the beginning of Balwinder's journey, he also seemed to have a slight negative view of 'religious' people.

"...People can get too caught up with dos and don'ts. People can kind of have a superiority complex where they think that, I'm following a religion, as you know, even in Sikhism, ego is a big thing, so by being religious, you might boast about it or worse, you might use it to oppress another person or look down upon another person, which kind of misses the point of the whole premise of religion..... you might dislike each other because it is based on a dualism, right and wrong, so there might be conflict between religion and people always run the risk of becoming too religious and kind of becoming a bit too egotistical and not really knowing who they really are in essence, just what they're supposed to be doing and what other people shouldn't be doing." (Line 22, BALWINDER)

Balwinder's critique of a particular kind of religious person, rather than religious people in general, includes quite a few strong words like 'oppress' 'conflict' and 'being too religious' or being 'too egotistical'. His objection for these individuals was that they hide behind their inflated egos behind their religion. In his view, being too religious meant becoming too egotistical too; this then meant that these people did not know who they really are. Balwinder could be referring to people who are dogmatic with their religion without engaging with the practice on a deeper level. That is, their religious practice can be almost carried out on autopilot without the heart in it (hence, they don't know who they really are). This was quite a definite and bold statement. He didn't buy into following a religion like the others did, with the 'should' and 'supposed to be doing' and would rather experience religion and make sense of it of his own accord. This was very similar to Harinder who had set a boundary for herself in terms of 'this is where I am' and 'this is where the rest of society are'. As she was finding her own identity in Sikhism over time, she realised that it is actually not as restrictive as she thought, and she developed her own way of being and how she felt

about it. In the same way, although Balwinder initially kept away from 'religious' people, he had later mentioned in the interview that after opening up his own mind, he saw them with a different perspective.

"Yes, so for me, religion...I only got interested in it...it kind of came at a good time in life. It came at the time when I started growing up, I stopped thinking like a kid. When I went to university.....and there was people there that lived opposite my road who I grew up with, who I always knew were religious but I didn't get too close cos I was a bit frightened, I didn't know what to expect, but then when I started to play football with them and go Gurdwara with them, they started to open up my eyes and I started to realise, that it's not really that bad once you get into it and it does have its benefits.." (Line 32, BALWINDER)

Balwinder mentioned 'growing up' evoking the image of his own self rising and developing, adopting a new way of thinking, and discontinuing his previous old way of thinking 'like a kid'. This seemed similar to Fowler's stages of faith (1981) at the "Individuative-Reflective" stage where individuals explored their own values and religious beliefs in great detail and carried this out. Perhaps the 'growing up' was metaphorical in that his view became more open and he no longer saw the over 'zealous' religious people representing all religious people. It came across that Balwinder's thoughts were developing and this was helping him move forward. It was unclear whether Balwinder's thoughts had stabilised or whether he was still going through a process of "thinking". However, this change in 'thinking' helped him become more open to religion, allowing people near him into his own world, testing the waters by meeting with them at a social function rather than a religious function – perhaps a more comfortable way of relating for him. Balwinder seemed purposeful in the steps he made towards religion.

Religion for Harinder was a way of finding her own personal identity and finding her own place in society as well as connecting with them. Spirituality was a way

of connecting to God and a way of coping with stressful situations. Throughout the interview, it was evident that Harinder seemed as though she was on a journey battling between external pressures to conform to a certain way to, in her view, be accepted by community of Sikhs (and to be loved/cared for) against her own internal or core self, which seemed to be trying to come out and become more confident about her own beliefs and understandings. Originally there appeared to be an over reliance or dependence on the perceived expectation of her by people in her society, unlike Balwinder, however it later came across that she was questioning, rejecting and moving on with her own individual path. Again, similar to Fowler's stages of faith (1981) at the "Individuative-Reflective" stage where she's exploring their own values and religious beliefs and carrying this out.

"...religion there is probably a set way of being religious according to society but spirituality not so much according to society. Personally I think religion should be exactly the same as spirituality.....it's just a case that in society today unfortunately for me it doesn't do that.. (Line 28-30, HARINDER)

Harinder differentiates between religion as a way of doing things as prescribed by society, whereas spirituality was a more personal and free endeavour. It seems that she sees spirituality as a more personal approach to religion which is therefore less restrictive. Towards the end of the interview, Harinder seemed to be processing her own thoughts about religion and forming her own unique views distinct from others in her Sikh society. She mentioned that she did not want to let herself down and felt that she was being "forced" to "face my own conscience" (line 161) almost as if a new self was emerging and she was moving away from her old self.

Balwinder also differentiated from his own path, however his own identity as a religious person was guided by his changing attitudes towards the religious people he met. He had opened his mind and allowed religious people into his space. After knowing them he found their company beneficial, however he still retained his analytical attitude:

“..It was obvious people...you know, some people had one agenda, you know, make sure he becomes a Sikh, make sure he keeps his kes. Other people couldn't care less, you know, whether I kept my kes or not, they just wanted me to be happy and guided in life and have known somewhere. And I basically saw something in them that I lacked myself so that's why I kind of tried to explore religion and then the more you get into it... I didn't just explore Sikhism, I explored all sorts; Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, even Islam, but I found more peace with Sikhism so then I decided to devote myself to that religion...” (Line 32, BALWINDER)

He was not disillusioned by his new religious friends and was able to distinguish, quite quickly it seems, that there were two types of religious people – ones' who had their own agenda and perhaps were more superficial with their religious practice (who wanted to impose their views and enforce religious rules) and ones who wanted for him to be guided by Sikhism. He made quite a strong statement that he did not follow the crowd and, regardless of his new friends, he still made sure this was the right path for him by exploring other religions and seeing what fit him best. Balwinder seemed to have strong sense of his own self-concept (Rogers, 1959). Balwinder did not seem swayed by the people around him. He seemed more interested in his own interpretations and making up his own mind about Sikhism. He stayed with this group of people as he found “something in them that [he] lacked himself.” It was unclear what he felt he lacked from his own self that religion provided. Perhaps this was peace, guidance, happiness or connection. The next theme looks at connection in more detail and will maybe shed more light to this.

In terms of Balwinder's particular journey, his early view of 'religious people' has a great deal of truth to it, particularly where some very judgemental individuals are concerned. His subsequent change of view is motivated by being able to reflect upon his and others qualities and still with a degree of diligence understand that he needed to make an informed decision. Therefore it would be difficult to say that he began the journey being narrow minded and become more open to new experiences and understanding as time went by. He still seems critical of people who worried more about the religious ritual than seeking deeper meaning.

Looking at Harinder's and Balwinder's journey so far, religious identity was to a considerable degree formed through the social relationships they were established. In Inderjit's case, social relationships helped him with creating his own beliefs and values in religion too. Hood, Hill and Pilka (2009) stated that research on religion with regards to the social-psychological stance predicts that people seek meaning about their place in the social world through connections to others and social roles. Inderjit, through his connection with others was able to find his own place, this was also the case with Harinder and Balwinder. Inderjit created his own beliefs that evolved from his peers and social groups thus developing his own self-reliance. Inderjit appeared to be quite strong in his own inner self to make his decisions about following Sikhism and was not swayed or governed by others:

“...Which is, you know I don't think anyone has the right to tell anybody you know you're doing this wrong or you know you're doing this, this is bad or you know this is against Sikhi 'cos Sikhi is very individualistic..” (Line 59, INDERJIT)

It was clear that being his own person and his own unique self was particularly important to Inderjit. He seemed to put great importance on learning about and experiencing Sikhism for himself, and not depending on others. His independence did not place him in opposition to others but was merely concerned with formulating his own interpretation of the religious teaching. He did not seem deeply concerned about others and their own individual interpretations of religion in the way Harinder had been, and seemed more focused except on how he practised himself that made sense to him at his own situation at that moment in time. Since religion was a part of Inderjit's identity and making sense of his own interpretations, there was no need to be self-critical but more of a need to be more accepting of himself, being aware of his own limitations and working on improving himself. This was very similar to Fowler's (1981) "Universalizing" stage where individuals tend to be in their 50's or 60's. It was a stage where an individual was more stable in their views, therefore more accepting. This stage was also classed as "enlightenment" with transcending belief systems to achieve a sense of oneness with all beings.

"...so everything I do, I do it because I want to do it, so you know I might not get all my paath done every single day but I do the best I can.... I do whatever..I do what makes me happy, but I know deep down that I've still gotta make improvements.." (Line 63, INDERJIT)

There seemed to be no arrogance in Inderjit's stance and he was clearly aware that he was not perfect and was humble about his strengths and weaknesses. Although he admitted that he may not pray as often as he would like, there was some recognition that prayer can be beneficial, hence his desire to making improvements in his prayer routine.

There was a clear sense of development especially in terms of social relationships with regards to the participants already mentioned, however not all participants' journeys were as clear as this. For example, parts of Sandeep's development seemed to come into the interview from time to time.

“...Erm.. and that's what helps me to live for myself and what I mean by that is erm.. is not really caring what society thinks of me..” (Line 46, SANDEEP)

He had appeared to form his own identity in terms of developing his own internal locus of evaluation. His stance was quite similar to Inderjit's in that his religion helped him to not care what society thought of him and, to clarify this, Inderjit mentioned later in the interview that the 'stress of pleasing people isn't usually on my mind' (line 50). Sandeep mentioned 'general society' which could mean the society as a whole, not just the Sikh community. In contrast, at the beginning of Kiran's journey, there was a concern regarding how she was perceived by others and an interest in the way she came across to others. This correlates with Erikson (1959) stage “Intimacy versus Isolation” at her age where great importance is placed upon relationships.

“....I was growing up and you know, erm.. very concerned about the way I appear, the way people see me, erm, whereas now I'm more like... I'm more concerned about myself and I know that sounds really selfish, I don't mean it in a selfish way..” (Line 18, KIRAN)

Here, you can see the beginning of Kiran's growth, similar to the development of the 'existential self' by the fact that she is less concerned about how she appears to other people and is more self-seeking. This is the most basic part of the self-scheme or self-concept; the sense of being separate and distinct from others and the awareness of the constancy of the self (Bee, 1992). Kiran had been more preoccupied by how she was perceived by others, which is in line with the idea of 'constancy' of the self. However this can also indicate the

opposite as when your sense of self is gauged by others' perceptions, it fluctuates a lot more according to who you are with and how you interpret their perception of you. Kiran was likely to have already formed a separate sense of self back in the first two years of her life (when she was not baptised), so once Kiran began to discover the self (in that her own opinion and perception of herself was important), she began to focus more on how she felt about herself, rather than concern herself with the opinions of others (internal frame of reference).

“...Erm I'm trying to get in tune with myself so I get to know myself very well so that I can be the best person that I can possibly be for the people around me and for the world around me. Erm, so yeah...” (Line 20, KIRAN)

In the previous extract Kiran seemed concerned about coming across as selfish when she prioritised appraising her own sense of self over how others perceive her. However, this next quote demonstrated the extent of her development; she wanted to be the 'best person' for herself as well as for others, therefore her priority was not necessarily for a selfish gain. Her developing self-concept was benefiting others, which she later mentioned helped her to find her place in the world.

In general there was a sense that some participants were initially governed by social relationships they had, perhaps even taking on the views of others at first, as in the case of like Harinder and Kiran, which formed their foundation (external locus of evaluation). Subsequently, the participants later formed their own views of religion from an internal locus of evaluation and this enabled them to create their identity from this new internal point of view. On the other hand, participants such as Balwinder and Inderjit seemed to initially work from their

own internal locus of evaluation and then later on took on board views from others that fit in with their own identity.

4.3.3.2 Guided by religious/spiritual principles

Research suggests that the guidance religion in general offers may lead to better mental health outcomes (Park & Slattery, 2013). Subsequently, this sub-theme was developed as a result of many of the participants indicating how part or most of their identity was guided by some of the religious or spiritual principles to which they subscribed.

Inderjit and Sandeep contrasted in terms of how they viewed the dress code of Sikhs being a part of their identity. Inderjit described his inner world as central to him rather than his outer world and the outer appearance of being a Sikh.

Inderjit: Sikhi is very individualistic..

Researcher: Yeah..

Inderjit: Urm..and....kind of going forward from that then that's why I think I probably keep my Sikhi a bit more ..it's a bit more of an inner than an outer thing..

Researcher: Yeah..

Inderjit: Like you know, I've specifically don't really wear a bana you know there's some things I don't do, which I probably should do but I think there maybe steps for me to take a bit later on.. (Line 56-59, INDERJIT)

Nielson and White (2008) discussed that people use outward signs, such as religious dress or grooming, to signify religious identity, group membership, and status. However, Inderjit seemed to hold a belief that his religion was individual and wearing the attire of a Sikh (bana) did not necessarily make him a good Sikh or a better person. Therefore, the bana did not appear to be a primary focus to his personal growth or his individual engagement at this time. There was an implication that he may do so "a bit later on". He classed himself as a Sikh who still needed to take steps, perhaps towards growth. However, it was

unclear whether the steps that he envisaged himself taking in the future were towards increasing his identity as a Sikh person or as a means to personal development. It is possible that these were indistinguishable for Inderjit. This seemed to echo Maslow (1962) who mentioned self-realisation as being represented as growth of an individual toward fulfilment of the highest needs.

On the other hand, Sandeep's sense of being a good person and living for himself was linked to keeping this physical appearance of a Sikh.

“..I do to an extent purely because I've got erm.. the appearance of a Sikh and erm.. I need to erm.. keep erm.. how do I explain it? I need to erm.. keep that appearance as raw as originally made to be..”(Line 48, SANDEEP)

For Sandeep, this pure, physical appearance that identified him as a Sikh to the outside world was an important part of his being. The physical appearance of being a Sikh was a symbol of his faith, a way of expressing this dedication to the outside world. This appeared to help him connect to his religion and his identity as a Sikh.

Kiran discussed Sikhism in terms of phases, as spiritual development or development of her own self. Erikson (1951, 1968) developed a widely used model of identity development that focused on development of identity via exploration and commitment. Interestingly, as mentioned previously, Inderjit also described his religion as a journey made up of a series of steps that was always evolving or developing, which appeared similar to Rogers' theory of self-actualisation (1959). These phases for Kiran were grouped into four sub-themes in order to show the development of this journey: self and others, finding self, stable present self and looking within self. This journey has helped increase Kiran's awareness of the self and the world around her.

“..I've been through quite a few phases through Sikhi erm.. and it's all about finding your self isn't it? Erm.. at the beginning, it was very much like, oh, Sikhs are supposed to be like this or I've got to be like this kind of thing and then slowly, it started to kind of transitioning to, hold on, like, what do you want? Like, what do you want out of this?” (Line 52, KIRAN)

It seems that the principles of religion and spirituality gave Kiran a sense of meaning which helped her to create a sense of self that was less self-destructive to her compared to her previous identity. Kiran had mentioned in her interview that, before being a baptised Sikh, she would drink as a way of coping with her problems. In one of the earlier phases (self and others) she had an expectation of Sikhs being a certain way and having to be a certain way herself. However, she then started to construct her own personality or way of being by questioning herself ('what do you want? What do you want out of this?'), which may possibly describe one of her phases (finding self) that she talked about so often. She came to a realisation of what she should be like, and found her own sense of self through the guidance of religion. This seemed to offer her solace. This parallels Park and Slattery (2013) research that the guidance religion offers can lead to better mental health outcomes. This seemed similar to the notion of individuation (Jung, 1935), the process whereby a person achieves a sense of individuality separate from the identity of others, and begins to consciously exist in the world. It is possible that an increased knowledge of spirituality (via practising Sikhism) has allowed Kiran to develop a further understanding of the world and her purpose within it.

As already discussed, the development of the self and identity featured quite strongly in some of the interviews. However, with others it was quite subtle, although still just as important for participants such as Pritam. Religion has

been within Pritam's family for a very long time and he was therefore born as a Sikh, like many of the participants. This seemed to be Pritam's foundation, his main base, forming part of his identity. Throughout the interview, Pritam made several references to being born as a Sikh (see lines 8, 10, 18) and 'If I wasn't a Sikh..' statements.

“...Because, you know, if you're given a kind of principle to follow to say that, look, be happy, or rehat as they call it in the Sikhi, erm.. it just manifests itself because it's in your being anyway, you've got that on your mind to be like that so you just manifest it automatically straightaway. Whether that means you are serving the community, whether that means you recognise yourself as a tool, that you are here for a reason...” (Line 94, PRITAM)

The principles of Sikhism (Rehat) seemed so ingrained within him that it was a part of his own being, which was reported to manifest itself without any great effort on his part. This continued ingrained belief of the principles of Sikhism seemed to give him a deeper meaning of himself and his 'place in the world' (line 14) as it seemed to provide a sense of 'knowing' of what to do (i.e., serving the community). This linked with Steger and Frazier (2005) findings that this sense of grasping the meaning of life and sense of purpose to life through religion was linked to positive functioning. This certainly appeared true in Pritam's case.

It is interesting to note that a few of the participants had mentioned how being a Sikh was a part of their own identity. For example, Harinder had mentioned that religion had always been a part of her life, and at times it was almost as if religion had become so much part of her own identity that it was hard to separate the two:

“...so say if I wasn't baptised then urr then I would have been someone that's not baptised but I don't know what that would feel like because since I remember, I've been religious...” (Line 81, HARINDER)

She had stated on a few occasions in the interview that she would not know who she was if not for her religion, and that she could not remember or feel how she was like before being committed/baptised. Inderjit had discussed a very similar notion when describing how his religion was almost amalgamated to his own being, and from which could it not be separated. This journey appeared to form part of his identity. Inderjit had mentioned that it was a “..part of my make-up....part of my DNA..” (Line 136). It appeared to be a lot stronger than just a journey, the journey was inextricably linked to his core self as closely as DNA is part of the human body. It is possible that this went beyond self-actualisation into transcendence, a dimension “beyond the natural and rational” (Banks, 1980, p. 196). Pritam discussed how the principles of Sikhism seemed so ingrained within him that it was a part of his own being, which manifested itself without any great effort on his part. This seemed to give him a deeper meaning of himself and his ‘place in the world’ (line 14).

The development of the self and identity featured quite clearly, although subtly in some participants. Quite a few participants mentioned that being a Sikh was part of their identity and interestingly, all had mentioned being born into a Sikh family. This appeared to be the foundation to which their identity developed through religious and spiritual practice. For example, the principles of Sikhism were deeply embedded within one particular participant, the dress code of a Sikh helped another identify himself and express this dedication. For another participant, this dress code alone did not make him a good Sikh. A few participants found their increased knowledge of spirituality gave them purpose or place in the world.

4.3.4. Superordinate theme 3: *Spiritual strivings*

Spiritual strivings are said to refer to goals that are concerned with the sacred. They can be seen as personal goals that are related to ones' ultimate purpose, ethics, commitment to a higher power, and to a seeking of the divine in daily experience (Emmons, 2005). Spiritual strivings can be seen as being motivated to transcend oneself, which can deepen or maintain a relationship with the higher power. It was apparent that some of the participants had their own personal goals that helped them to connect to God or a higher being, a being that can be internal or external to themselves. They each had constructed their own individual stories showing their personalised ways of spiritually striving. In this sample, these personal stories were constructed through participants' finding themselves, going through difficult times, monitoring and placing emphasis on their inner thoughts, as well as creating relationships and connecting.

Harinder had been through some difficult times and was quite open about this. This helped her to develop her emotional connection to God, which became an important part of her life:

“....and urm in that period originally when I came towards Sikhism I felt spiritually connected to God and when my dad fell ill. And I think the reason for that is because those were my most sma so the times where I've been most urm...uneasy in my life or out of control of my life or the worst periods of my life....” (Line 119, HARINDER)

Harinder mentioned feeling a connection to God predominantly as an emotional connection. This occurred at two particular events in her life that precipitated strong emotions and feelings (e.g., when her father fell ill). She felt a much deeper connection to God at these times and felt it was the reason she was

initially attracted to religion. In terms of Spiritual strivings, Emmons, Colby and Kaiser (1998) propose that this is likely to provide stability and support in times of crisis by reorienting people to what is ultimately important in life. During the interview with Harinder, this emotional connection to God came across as a religious method of coping to gain comfort and support as well as seeking a sense of connectedness/closeness with forces that transcend the self.

“.....I believe being spiritual and being religious is when you love God in a certain way, so urm, it should really be how you feel, cuz falling in love is how you feel so it should be how you feel that you respond in that manner.... (Line 51, HARINDER)

Harinder regarded her emotional connection to God, which she described as "falling in love" with God, as the primary meaning of religion and spirituality. That is, it is a matter of faith and something to be felt experientially rather than something that can be explained in rational terms. She understood religion and spirituality as closeness and connection rather than strict adherence to an orthodox creed or set of prescribed religious observations.

Inderjit seemed to devote a lot of time monitoring his inner thoughts, making sense of his life and himself, which deepened his relationship with the higher power.

Inderjit: It's more about what do I do with my down time, like when I'm doing paath, what I am thinking of? Is my mind actually blank or am I actually thinking about something or am I trying to converse with God?

Researcher: Hmmm.

Inderjit: I think I do bits of those so when I do....when I try and do bani, I'm trying to clear my mind and just do it from my heart. And then I always try and do it when I do ardaas, try and kind of have a little conversation. (Line 157-159, INDERJIT)

Mahoney and Pargament (2000) found that people tended to place a high priority on strivings that they viewed as sacred. They devoted more time and energy to spiritual strivings and derived greater satisfaction and sense of meaning from them relative to strivings that were more self-focused and materially oriented (see also Pargament, Magyar, & Murray-Swank, 2005). This examination of internal thoughts seemed important to Inderjit to help him succeed in having a clear mind to focus on praying with his heart and having a conversation with God, implying that the connection with God was through feelings and not just through the mind.

Pritam was quite similar to Inderjit in terms of emphasis being on his thoughts and feelings to transcend oneself. Pritam made many references to this throughout his whole interview. Pritam was a deep thinker who pondered over life, worries and general decisions. He had mentioned quite early on in the interview about channelling his thoughts which, in his view, was the purpose of religion.

“...Erm.. And really religion – it’s more of a channel or a way to implement those thoughts and that energy, if you will, and to kind of implement it and put it into a form where you can.. where you can act on it, so you’re not just having these thoughts, where you can actually implement these things and put them into practice as well...” (Line 16, PRITAM)

This extract from the interview is quite central to Pritam’s way of being as Pritam makes several references back to this point of channelling his thoughts. This could also be seen as a way of coping with stresses and concerns; he had made reference to this later in the interview about channelling his frustration and anger to his “higher consciousness” (line 42) to have a different perspective. Throughout the interview Pritam mentioned several times that he

was a 'deep thinker' and religion helped him direct these thoughts. Pritam used religion and wisdom from others to set his personal goals to act and spiritually strive and make better decisions. His 'deep thinking', which was guided by religion, helped him to make better informed decisions in his life.

“..I personally have always been a bit of a deep thinker so I guess if we take religion out of the equation again, I think I would always be pondering and just thinking about things over and over again. Now, I know the question is about spirituality rather than religion, I guess religion helps you direct those thoughts and kind of think of there is a way, which can be helpful...” (Line 114, PRITAM)

Pritam makes it clear that, regardless of religion being present in his life, he would still be 'pondering and thinking' and these would be more consistent without religion. In his view, the ruminating thoughts will be unstructured and uncontrolled without religion present. Perhaps this is part of Pritam's innate personality, to think and analyse, and in his view without religion he would be left in limbo with his thoughts without any direction. I am left wondering whether he believed these thoughts would overwhelm him if there was no direction. He did mention later (line 128) that he would not know what to do with his thoughts, being at a loss and being left with possible confusion. He went on to discuss what would happen if he did not have this channel – 'they would well up inside' (line 130) giving the image of a person being very emotional, 'welling up' with tears perhaps, finding it difficult to control or manage their emotions. However religion and, to some degree, spirituality is seen as saviour. He went on to talk about his distinct quality of being a deep thinker and the benefits of religion,

“...Where.. I think if I wasn't a thinker, or if I didn't have any kind of religion to follow, erm.. I would be bottled, I would be a blank canvas and I wouldn't know what to do with myself. I wouldn't know what to think or anything...” (Line 124, PRITAM)

This is a strong statement indicating that both religion and his quality of being a thinker is all he knows of himself and how he sees himself. Without these he would almost be nothing 'a blank canvas' or lost, and his thoughts/feelings would be bottled up with no way of them escaping. Having both these traits seemed important to his own being and self-preservation giving him a particular direction and a means of channelling this energy with the possibility of connecting to a higher power.

Sandeep also portrayed a deeper and more spiritual connection with his religion through prayer and meditation between which he made quite distinct comparisons. For example, religion promoted meditation as a spiritual activity. In his view, prayer meant asking for something from God, an idea with which he seemed uncomfortable.

Sandeep: Erm.. Yeah.. I think erm.. other things for example, I'm at University at the moment, in my final year, and with coursework, like, a lot of people will erm.. do some kind of prayers before to make sure they get a good grade and stuff like that but..

Researcher: OK.

Sandeep: I think that's a good thing to do but I personally don't like doing that because it feels like I'm just using God when I want to and I don't think about him after (laughs)...

Researcher: No..

Sandeep: But erm.. I try not to erm.. ever ask for those kinds of things – I don't see erm.. how that's really gonna be beneficial in your spirituality, it's.. I don't know, it's kind of....it kind of makes me feel fake, I guess if I do that.

Researcher: Yeah..

Sandeep: It's good because you should have that love and respect to know that God will give you what you want and it's not like it's a bad thing to ask for but erm.. I know, things like, there's erm.. some kind of erm..that you need to.. there's a level...

Sandeep: Hmmm..

Participant: I think I've put that level really high maybe, I don't know, that's just how I feel. (Line 59 – 68, SANDEEP)

Sandeep discussed God in terms of a person in quite a powerful way. He felt he would be using God if he requested his aid for personal gain; this was not a concept he was entirely comfortable with. In his view he felt that this was 'fake' and 'selfish' and not authentic, and which could affect his spirituality. It was at this time Sandeep briefly mentioned there being 'levels' to spirituality, where a higher level was to have faith in God that he will provide for you without asking. Perhaps using prayer to obtain what he desired is to Sandeep a lower level of religious belief, a rather utilitarian orientation that he found questionable. His own deeper connection to the higher power was Sandeep's belief that she had a personal relationship with God, which required him to trust with God would provide and that therefore it would be unseemly to ask. In Sandeep's view, this omniscient God already knew what was needed and it expressed love and respect for God by trusting in his mercy. Perhaps having this positive image of God is the reason Sandeep expressed feelings of happiness and oneness (Bradshaw et al., 2008), an almost transcending of oneself.

Kiran's spiritual strivings were quite apparent throughout the interview. She made many references to 'finding herself' or 'being found' or that something 'needs to be found' when she talked about this journey of becoming a committed 'Sikh'. This can be seen as being motivated to transcend oneself, which can deepen or maintain a relationship with a higher power. Kiran had mentioned that religion had 'saved her' showing her deep devotion and loyalty to her religion. Kiran had mentioned that she went through a phase in her life where she felt drink was her only answer and her only way of coping with the obstacles she faced and the challenges she met, however Sikhism came to her rescue like the proverbial knight in shining armour.

“..And Sikhi is kind of like always taught me, you know, that’s like one of the main things we know, in Sikhi, erm.. and there is a reason why it’s there, I trust Sikhi, I trust Sikhi with my life because it saved me...” (Line 116, KIRAN)

With Sikhism Kiran seemed to have found an emotional equilibrium, a greater understanding of the self, and seemed better able to deal with the hurdles of life. Pargament (2002) stated that spiritual strivings may have a unique empowering function; people are more likely to persevere in these strivings, even under difficult circumstances. This is how Sikhism seemed to have ‘saved’ her. This in turn, provided a sense of trust and faith; she mentioned trust twice in the same sentence, almost as though she was confirming this.

Balwinder discussed relationships and connection throughout the interview and perhaps these are linked to tell his story of how he makes sense of religion and spirituality in his life. He seemed to talk about faith in two ways, one of a faith that seemed to involve a deeper connection, and another where you have faith in the rituals religion provided. It was by having faith in both this deep personal sense and a more ritualistic one that helped him to feel this connection to others and to a higher power.

“..you have a sense of faith that goes with it so you have to have faith in that religion that by doing this certain thing, it will actually get me somewhere or it will benefit me greatly, and also religion is a way of erm, kind of feeling closer to the fellow human being, if you will, cos if you both follow the same religion, you kind of feel like you are heading in the same direction, living the same sort of life...” (Line 16, BALWINDER)

Religion helped the participants to feel close to others (‘human beings’). Balwinder discussed others following the same religion with the same direction and feeling a sense of camaraderie with them. In his view religion helps to feel a sense of closeness or belonging with others of the same faith – ‘heading in the

same direction' – due to having similar personal goals. It seemed quite important to Balwinder to have a shared understanding and a similar goal or purpose with others. This provided his own social support on one level, which is said to promote meaning and belongingness (Ladd & McIntosh, 2008; Smith, 2003). He did later discuss his idea of the soul, connecting to this, which allowed him to connect to others as well as to God. This connection was distinguished as being beyond the five senses, a connection outside of himself, or to something bigger than himself,

“...you could actually feel that sensation of God everywhere, so that's what I class as spiritual. So religion is just me telling my body and my mind to do something but spirituality is me actually connecting beyond the 5 senses to everything around me and realising that, everything I hear, feel, you know, anything I can conjure is probably there to benefit me and connect me more to my surroundings and the omnipresent God, if you will.” (Line 68, BALWINDER)

Balwinder suggested a spirituality that was beyond his own self where a sense of trust and faith was discovered. This connected him to his surroundings, as well as to God who is omnipresent. In this extract he also further distinguished between religion and spirituality and how they helped him – religion provided guidance for his body and mind, while spirituality helped him connect to the eternal world, and, through this, to God. This connection he discussed had come up many times throughout his interview.

“Yeah, absolutely. There's a different sort of sensation you feel from spirituality that you might not feel when you are religious, so religious for example, doing my matha tek in front of Maharaj; if I did it on a religious level, yes I'd be like OK, Guru's saying put my head to the Guru, put my head down whatever, I could tell you what it meant, but there's no feeling behind it, so, spirituality, what that did, it connected me more to Maharaj, it made me understand the essence of humility and how by connecting to Maharaj, they take everything away, you know, and then I'm just left with the bliss. It's a pretty good deal if you think about it, you can give all your bad traits or the bad things to Maharaj, and they fill you with bliss and then you start connecting to it and it's not that type of Ras that goes away, like alcohol, food you know, these types of things, cos you're continually....you've

got to keep doing it to keep that buzz on a high, spirituality kind of gives you that bliss that stays with you and you kind of feel it more with everything around you.”(Line 70, BALWINDER)

Interestingly, he mentioned that spirituality in his view has a ‘different sort of sensation’ than mere religion. Was his awareness heightened when he expressed the feeling of God being experienced ‘everywhere’ as a result of this sense of connection? He mentioned religion as being a description of a set of, devoid of feeling, whereas spirituality appeared to give him a lot more. There was a belief that connecting to God (*Maharaḡ*) meant that his undesirable traits or qualities were taken away and replaced with ‘bliss’. This seemed similar to the idea of mindfulness or meditation where peace is acquired from negative (or ‘bad’) thoughts or feelings of pain and suffering. Interestingly he compared this type of bliss to the one he would experience when he would previously drink alcohol or consume food; an analogy for the need to keep on drinking and eating to sustain the desired effects. Therefore the sense of connection to God needs to be regularly maintained for the ‘bliss’ to stay. The bliss he experienced from spirituality remained due to the connection he had felt. Consequently, religious practice without deeper engagement can become automated and does not provide a deep felt connection. Other participants had replaced their undesirable traits or behaviours with rituals or other religious coping, Balwinder seemed to replace his drinking with ‘feeling more connected’; a healthier coping strategy.

“The disadvantages of spirituality are that sometimes you can become so detached from the world, you’ve got to kind of play the game... So if you become too spiritual, you might want to....like that’s what happened, when I became a bit too spiritual;, I didn’t want to go to Uni, I didn’t want to work, I just wanted to focus and connect to people..... Spirituality, sometimes what can happen is if you become too spiritual, you do say things as they are, you know, or you can like kind of ignore people’s feelings cos you are more focused on something else but

then you've got to come back into this and say, look, you can't say certain things cos they might hurt other people's feelings, no matter how true it might be, and you've gotta kind of be more alert to how people are feeling as well, not just yourself. Spirituality again, if you focus on yourself quite a lot, which you are supposed to do, you ignore people around you and you know, their happiness could be your happiness, you know, so that's the disadvantages." (Line 74, BALWINDER)

It was interesting that Balwinder's notion of being too spiritual meant that you would become more disconnected ('detached') from reality. This made Balwinder's experience quite distinct to that of the others in that he mentioned a need to find a balance between living his daily life and pursuing spiritual bliss so he does not become too detached from the world. In his view there was a danger of focusing on yourself too much (internal) when becoming too spiritual.

It is interesting to note that there was a similarity amongst the participants in that religion is seen as a type of 'saviour' or as something 'saving them' from themselves going down a darker path. All the participants were baptised and committed to their religion and seemed to place a high priority on striving for what they viewed as sacred. Mahoney and Pargament (2000) mentioned that individuals are likely to devote more time and energy to spiritual strivings and derive greater satisfaction and sense of meaning from such pursuits compared to strivings that are more self-focused and materially oriented. Although some participants talked about themselves, it was in a more selfless way and more in the sense of getting to know themselves on a higher level or consciousness, and connecting to others and God or a Higher Being.

4.3.5. Superordinate theme 4: An aid to wellbeing – Religious/Spiritual Coping

Folkman and Lazarus (1980, p. 223) define coping as “the cognitive and behavioural efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them”. All participants in this study had had their own way of coping with stress and difficulties. They used a variety of religious rituals as well as concepts from philosophical perspectives given by the Sikh religion, which generated the two subordinate themes for this superordinate theme.

4.3.5.1. Religious rituals as tools

Throughout the transcripts, there was a sense that most of the participants used the religious rituals such as prayer to manage and cope with day-to-day stresses in particular. For instance, carrying out religious rituals enabled participants’ to bring about a sense of control and helped to regulate emotions by bringing their focus on the here-and-now.

Harinder, Sandeep and Balwinder were all similar in using meditation and prayer as a way of coping. Harinder and Balwinder also used other religious rituals such as Singing hymns, selfless service (*seva*) and going to the *gurdwara* (Sikh place of worship) to manage their stress and worries.

Harinder felt religious rituals gave her some control and used methods such as prayer, meditation and *kirtan* (devotional music) as coping mechanisms for her day-to-day stresses.

“...but then when I was singing hymns or I was urm praying, I felt as though that was something in my control that was going to have an effect on his health because I had faith and that..” (Line 69, HARINDER)

“..and prayers and stuff that will help me, singing hymns helps me so when I’m really really stressed I can sit down and I can listen to some hymns and that will

help me or I will sing them and that will help me so in that way it will help me and I don't think when, so that will help, it helps me a lot more with bigger stresses, because bigger stresses...." (Line 67, HARINDER)

Lorenz claims that "human rituals serve the same function as animal ritualization – communicating" (cited by Wulff, 1997, p. 155). For Harinder, these rituals served as a way of communicating with God or herself. Harinder had mentioned that her connection with God was an emotional one and it was at its peak when she was going through a period of high stress. Praying and meditating was her form of communicating with God to help her through difficult situations (e.g., when her father became ill). Poloma and Gallup (1991) claimed that prayer's importance is largely due to its "improving a sense of well-being" (p. 5). It seems that praying and meditating helped Harinder establish a sense of well-being. Jackson and Bergeman (2011) also mentioned that prayer and worship correlate positively with personal control, which leads to improved well-being. They theorised that a high degree of religious practices, spiritual experiences, and religious coping can lead to greater perceived control, which enhanced subjective well-being. Similarly, Harinder mentioned that praying and singing hymns was something 'in her control'. She regained control using religious rituals, showing her that her own efforts can help her situation.

Another participant, Sandeep, also used meditation and prayer to gain some control over managing his vices and feelings related to stress. According to Watts (2007), religion and spirituality provide ways to regulate emotions and feelings. More specifically, Chopko and Schwartz (2009) suggest that adopting contemplative and meditative practices have been shown to decrease

emotional reactivity, which worked well with Sandeep's need for self-regulation or control over his vices.

"I think spirituality... that's erm.. obviously, my views of spirituality is meditation and prayers and connecting to it all.." (Line 123, SANDEEP)

In Sandeep's view, religion promoted meditation as one of the tools to be used, perhaps to control his emotions or vices, as mentioned previously. However spirituality was the connection to this meditation. His experiences of meditation led to "more of a positive state" as well as gathering information from other sources to the benefits of meditation.

Sandeep: Erm.. but religion, erm.. religion promotes meditation and things like that and obviously, meditation has scientifically been proven to be helpful erm.. but even science aside, erm.. it's just the personal experiences of things like meditation, erm. . it just generally brings me into more of a positive state and erm.. to be honest, I'd count the whole meditation aspect as more of a spiritual thing rather than religious thing.

Researcher: OK.

Sandeep: Erm.. just like because like I said before, I'd say it's more, religion is more like a tool.. (Line 100-103, SANDEEP)

To Sandeep, meditation was seen as a technique to regulate or control his emotions and feel more positive, whereas prayer was a way of asking God for a good circumstance. For example, Sandeep gave the example of others taking exams and praying to get a good grade. He understood that others would do this, however he did not feel this was something he could do personally. In his view, he felt this was 'fake' (line 63) and 'selfish' (line 63) which could affect his spirituality.

Similar to the other two participants, Balwinder had also mentioned meditation and prayer as a way of calming his mind especially with his day-to-day stresses,

“....What Sikhism does just by daily routine, like meditation and nitnem, doing seva and going Gurughar...it kind of calms the mind a little bit and those kind of stresses go away.....” (Line 60, BALWINDER)

Balwinder had also mentioned routinely engaging in several types of religious rituals to reduce stress and mental worries such as *nitnem*, *recitation* of the specific prayers read by Sikhs a daily basis, as well *seva* (selfless service) and going to the religious place of worship. He seemed to have a developed set of religious rituals.

Inderjit did also mention prayer however not as much as the previous participants:

“...so everything I do, I do it because I want to do it, so you know I might not get all my paath done every single day but I do the best I can.... I do whatever..I do what makes me happy, but I know deep down that I've still gotta make improvements..” (Line 63, INDERJIT)

He admitted that he may not pray as often as he felt he ought, and there was some recognition that prayer can be beneficial. In his own view, happiness is more important to him at present, however this may only be on a superficial level since ‘deep down’ there is an awareness that there may be more than this. His deeper awareness of himself was evidenced in his clarification of his ‘down time’ (line 157) involved prayer. For him, prayer is more of a spiritual activity, like meditation, whereas Sandeep, Harinder and Balwinder saw prayer as more goal orientated, ritualistic and perhaps reflective of a narrower sense of religious practice. Although the notion of prayer seemed to be interpreted differently on the surface, the underlying sense is similar in that they strove to make a connection to God through prayer or meditation.

Other participants such as Inderjit and Kiran had also mentioned prayer as a way of coping, however they put emphasis on other ways of managing stress, particularly the use of Sikh philosophical perspectives.

4.3.5.2. Sikh philosophical perspectives as guides

This theme was named philosophical perspectives as the participants in this section used Sikh or spiritual principles and philosophies to cope with their daily, as well as more significant stresses, such as the rules and regulations or Sikh's code of conduct (e.g., no alcohol), or Sikh stories which described the importance and the benefits of morality and ethics as a way of being. Sikh stories are called *sakhi*'s and tend to have moralistic and ethical aspects to them as well as stories about the Gurus (religious teachers) and their way of life.

For Inderjit, the Sikh stories had a powerful effect on him and his family, providing a way of coping or managing with negative emotions and stress as a family, by putting issues into perspective. These stories became a part of their family life or a way of coping like a family script.

Inderjit: Yeah, I think yeah....that's one of the things as we've grown up...erm....Mum used to read us Sakhia every day.

Researcher: Oh that's nice.

Inderjit: So on the way to school we used to have a sakhi and then when we used to go to the gurdwara

Researcher: Yeah...

Inderjit: And so it's always been like a kid so I don't know how she kept that up for 3 or 4 years but there was always a new Sakhi so it was always something that you looked forward to.

Researcher: Yeah...

Inderjit: And it just becomes to be ingrained in you and now sometimes somebody will be talking about like an English story and the moral of it, and I

think my mum told me about this when I was 12 years old (laughs). (Line 217-223, Inderjit)

The stories helped Inderjit would put his stresses in perspective. The virtues and morals of the stories seemed to become ingrained in him whilst growing up, motivating him to live by these ideals in his daily life. Inderjit's mother seemed quite influential in Inderjit's way of being and his way of coping with daily stresses. This is possibly where his motivation for gathering knowledge may have originated. His mother provided moralistic and virtuous stories igniting his excitement to know more.

Pritam and Kiran differed to Inderjit in that they used guidance of the principles of the Sikh religion. For example, Pritam stated that,

“..Erm..I think my day-to-day stresses – it's erm.. it's a little bit harder to control because, you know, obviously on a regular basis, erm.. one of the erm.. principles of Sikhi is that whatever happens, it's meant to happen for a reason.” (Line 38, PRITAM)

Pritam subscribed to the mentality that stresses and worries were not under his control and accepted that they existed, almost taking on a deterministic or fatalistic approach to his problems, accepting that he could not do anything about them and making peace with his circumstances. Kiran on the other hand, mentioned her socially accepted Indian culture of drinking, which had initially led her to drink alcohol as a coping mechanism for her overwhelming emotions. After re-discovering religion, Kiran realised that alcohol was only a short-term fix, which temporarily allowed her to forget her problems rather than deal with them.

“...Erm... and those guidelines are kind of like...have kind of helped me in my well-being because like it's one thing that Sikhs can't do is can't drink...” (Line 36, KIRAN)

“...Do you know what I mean and if it's not there, I've got to deal with it in another way (laughs) so like you know, it's like learning how to deal with it erm... and I think just having that there, just knowing that you can't turn to alcohol, you've got to do something else...” (Line 38, KIRAN)

The guidelines outlined by the Sikh religion on the other hand gave Kiran boundaries, discipline and more self-control. One of the rules or guidelines of Sikhism is that you cannot drink alcohol, and Kiran abided by this code which allowed her to move out of her comfort zone, to find a different way of coping. Smith et al. (2003) reported that as certain religions prohibit the use of intoxicants such as alcohol, substance abuse could be less likely and subsequently, comorbid conditions (i.e., depression) could also be less likely. Although alcohol had given her a way of forgetting her problems, she mentioned that she felt more peaceful being intoxicant-free (line 26).

Kiran and Inderjit were the only ones who used religious rituals such as meditation and prayer as well as the Sikh philosophies or principles, such as the discipline, to help manage their stress and cope with daily life as well as more significant stresses. Interestingly, Kiran, Harinder and Sandeep had all mentioned that these aids to wellbeing helped with self-control: Kiran and Harinder in helping them not to drink or otherwise make bad decisions, and Sandeep in controlling his emotions or vices. It was considered that control could be a theme, however it was concluded that control was better placed within discussion of religious coping methods.

In general, participants used Sikh or spiritual principles and philosophies to help with putting their stresses in perspective or helping them to have boundaries to inhibit them from going out of control and adopting an unhealthy coping strategy

(such as using alcohol). These principles and philosophies seemed to touch the moralistic and ethical side for some participants.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter looked more closely at the younger age group to explore their personal experience of Sikhs and their perceptions of religion and spirituality. The main aim of study two was to explore the personal experience of Sikhs and their personal perceptions of religion and spirituality to explore whether this had an effect on their wellbeing and ability to deal with stresses.

Analysing the interviews of participants' offered an in depth understanding of participants own subjective realities and the meaning they ascribed to their experiences of religion and spirituality. The superordinate themes discovered represented an overall story. The story started with each participant going through their own journey which appeared to be initiated by an internal struggle. This struggle motivated participants to learn more about themselves and their own personal goals which provided ways to cope with this struggle. Consequently, the four superordinate themes found were namely, religious and spiritual struggles, religion and spirituality assisted with the development of self and identity; spiritual striving and aids to well-being; and, religious/spiritual coping

The first superordinate theme was 'religious and spiritual struggles'. Religious and spiritual struggles can be seen as negative thoughts about the divine, feeling oppressed, struggling to follow moral and religious principles, interpersonal conflicts around religion as well as having doubts about the

beliefs. Most of the participants had experienced religion predominantly in their teens. A conflict can occur at this stage as adolescents go through a process between identity versus role confusion according to Erikson. At this stage, intense analysis occurs of personal goals, beliefs and values in the search for a sense of self. Most of the participants, apart from one, discussed a particular struggle that deepened their relationship with religion and spirituality.

The second superordinate theme was 'religion and spirituality assisted with the development of self or identity'. To varying degrees, all participants talked about developing themselves in their own personal journeys through their pursuit of religiosity and spirituality. In general some participants were initially governed by social relationships they had with regards to religion, perhaps even taking on the views of others at first, forming their foundation (external locus of evaluation); then later rejecting their views and finding their own from an internal locus of evaluation and forming their own identity as well as religious or spiritual faith. Interestingly, these were more pronounced in the females of the group. On the other hand, most male participants seemed to work from their own internal locus of evaluation, later taking on views from others that fit in with their own identity. It is possible that females placed more importance on social relationships than their male counterparts in the early stages of their development.

The third superordinate theme, 'spiritual strivings', was seen as being motivated to transcend oneself, which can deepen or maintain a relationship with a higher power. As participants were baptised and therefore committed to their religion, this seemed to motivate them to place a high priority on striving and deepening

their relationship with a higher power. They each had their own personal goals to help them connect, and each had their own personalised ways of spiritually striving. These included going through a particular difficulty, placing emphasis on inner thoughts and connecting to others. Interestingly there was a similarity amongst the participants in that religion took on the role of a 'saviour' or was seen as 'saving them' from themselves going down a darker path, or from the stresses or challenges they faced.

The fourth and last superordinate theme 'aids to wellbeing'. Religious rituals were particular tools suggested by religion and spirituality, such as meditation and prayer which appeared to help with controlling stress and emotions providing a sense of peace and calm. Philosophical perspectives were concepts from religion and spirituality such as avoiding the abuse of intoxicants which inhibited an individual from going out of control and providing a different perspective, which in turn forced an individual to adopt a healthier way of coping with stress. Most of the participants used meditation and prayer as a way of coping whereas others used both prayer as well as other religious and spiritual methods such as singing hymns, selfless service (seva) and going to the Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship).

Most of the participants seemed quite open and honest especially when talking about their vulnerabilities and struggle. However, as seen in the second superordinate theme, the females appeared to start their journeys from an external locus of evaluation whereas the males (only two of the males) started their journeys from an internal locus of evaluation. Interestingly, two of the females in the study were of similar age (29 years old) and had been through

quite similar difficulties especially with drinking. Both were also older than their male counterparts.

Being an interviewer was a different experience to being a therapist. It was speculated whether this had an effect on the interview process and the way in which participants responded. It was realised that the interviews were initially held quite rigidly, sticking to the interview schedule, however after reflection (see Chapter 6 for further reflections) and supervision, this became easier and the interviews became more fluid. This is an important aspect of the study and could have had an effect on how some of the participants responded to the interview questions.

CHAPTER 5: Overall Discussion

The overall aim of this research was to explore the personal experience of Sikhs and their personal perceptions of religion and spirituality to investigate whether this had an effect on their wellbeing and dealing with stresses.

The main aim of study one was to offer an insight into the meanings of religion and spirituality within a Sikh Community by exploring how the two concepts were defined by Sikh from a wide age range. Thematic analysis was used with the scope of including a larger sample. Two overarching themes emerged from the data and both themes looked at the 'self' in terms of their interactions with their internal and external world. If we considered Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (1979) to explain the external world, the individual differences are accounted for by intricate interactions among systems of varying levels. For example, the subtle associations between the microsystem and macrosystem part of the individual's life. The microsystem is seen as the 'developing person' experiencing their immediate environment in interactions with others. For example, family, peer group, work place, and school. The macrosystem relates to the broader system involving a given culture or subculture. Therefore a person is affected by everything in their surrounding environment. In terms of an internal world, this was best represented by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) where one is motivated in self-fulfilment and self-growth and having an awareness that this is within their own control and not just outside forces. Two ages group were contrasted; the 20-30 year olds and 40-50+ year olds.

The main aims of study two was to explore the personal experience of Sikhs and their personal perceptions of religion and spirituality to determine whether this had an effect on their wellbeing and dealing with stresses, particularly focusing on the age group 20-30 year olds. IPA was used to focus on this age group complementing thematic approach in the first study which used a larger sample. Whilst analysing the interview transcripts, four superordinate themes were found that were related to the lived experience of religion and spirituality and how these affect wellbeing. The superordinate themes that were found narrated an overall story. The story started with each participant going through their own journey which appeared to be initiated by an internal struggle. This struggle motivated participants to learn more about themselves through religion and spirituality and their own personal goals which provided ways to cope with this struggle. The particular themes were namely, religious and spiritual struggles, religion and spirituality assisted with the development of self and identity; spiritual strivings, and aids to well-being: religious/spiritual coping.

Considering both these studies collectively, the first study gave an overall picture of the religious or spiritual 'self' or individual being affected by both the internal and external world, across the age group. The second study refined particularly how these internal and external worlds effected an individual within a defined age group; 20-30 year olds.

5.1. Research findings in relation to existing literature

In study one, the age group between 20-30 years old who took part in the research and the participants who were a lot older who took part seemed settled in their religious and spiritual practice. It was speculated that the older

participants were perhaps less preoccupied to search for the meaning of life because they have more stable ideas of who they are with a more established career path. They may have accepted their definition of religion and spirituality and had gone past the need to create an identity; the identity would already have been built over time and therefore just peace and inner contentment was required. They may have already assumed more roles in their interpersonal relationships. Therefore forming stable relationships and beginning a family and developing a sense of being a part of the bigger picture similar to Erikson's (1959) psychosocial model. For example, being a partner/husband/wife, a parent, a grandparent, a carer etc. Many of the multiple roles that they have might have diverted their attention away from searching for the meaning of their life. Perhaps they might be more settled into their religious or spiritual practice because they had more years behind them or there was a lesser need for religion to find out who they are and their identity.

In study two, IPA was used to analyse a small proportion of the Sikh population for a more in-depth exploration of a certain age group (20-30 year olds). Having an identity may be more important when younger where a person is more fluid and changeable. In the theory of Emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) described a phase of lifespan between adolescence and adulthood (approximately 18-25 years old), a stage where they are not considered adolescents or entirely as adults. Arnett (2000) described these young adults as becoming more independent and having the opportunities to explore various life possibilities. There are also negative psychological consequence of not having a firm identity in your 20s, according to Arnett and researchers in the field. Ludwig (2010) described struggling with "identity exploration and instability" in the late 20's

(similar to participants in this study), where perhaps they are still quite fluid therefore it is more beneficial to solidify their identity. Having this fluidity in their identity could mean that they are still looking for their meaning or purpose in life and are still asking a lot of questions about their life (some internal or external struggle), similar to the participants in this study who were in their 20-30s. For these participants the search for their identity and developing the self was achieved using the tools and principles of the Sikh religion and spirituality in terms of their wellbeing.

Interestingly this finding seemed similar to Fowler's stages of faith (1981) where the participants in their 20s and 30s were at the "Individuative-Reflective" stage, a stage of angst and struggle where the individual takes personal responsibility for their beliefs and feelings. They explore in depth their own values and religious beliefs and carry this out. However one participant, Inderjit (in study 2), seemed to be at a stage where people in their 40s and 50s were placed. Fowler (1981) called this stage the "Universalizing" stage, which some might call "enlightenment", transcending belief systems to achieve a sense of oneness with all being. It may be that, compared to the other participants, Inderjit may already have his stable ideas and views and stability in life in general such as an established career and personal relationships.

All age groups interrelated in terms of their chosen faith/religion. For example, participants in this study appeared to have an interest in religion and spirituality and placed importance on such matters that affected their mental wellbeing. In literature Wuthnow (2007) suggested that religion was diminishing in each successive generation based on declines in religious attendance. On the other

hand, Cherry, DeBerg and Porterfield (2001) found student's interest in religion was quite strong. Although both these studies were in the US, there was suggestion in this study, in the UK, that religion may still be of some significance.

Although Sikhism is a relatively young religion, there were some similarities in terms of religion and spirituality with previous research with other religions. For example praying and meditating was a similar concept in most religions. Other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism and Islam have organized communal worship which is a significant part of religious life, similar to that of Sikhs. This offers a person social support and a sense of belonging and commonality. All religions have their own set of rules and guidelines, a belief in God. For many religions, including Sikhism, religion communicates a sense of meaning and purpose to life, which has been linked to positive functioning (Steger & Frazier, 2005). In this study, Sikhism has differed to other religions in its concept of the development of self in their external/social world as well as their internal world. This particular concept is important in therapy for self-awareness and self-development. Brawer, Handel, Fabricatore, Roberts and Wajda-Johnston (2002) found that religion and spirituality can contribute to increased rates of wellbeing and life satisfaction and a decreased rate of "suicide, substance abuse and anti-social behaviour" (p.4). This study had certain participants who had replaced their drinking habits with healthier coping strategies inspired by religion and spirituality. In general, participants in this study seemed to have an increased rate of wellbeing having religion and spirituality in their lives. Similarly, religiosity has predicted wellbeing for Muslim undergraduates in Egypt and Kuwait (Abdel-Khalek, 2012; Sahrainen, Gholami, Javadpour, & Omidvar,

2013), positive relation was found between religiosity and life satisfaction in Hindu, Muslim and Christian students in South Africa (Patel, Ramgoon, & Paruk, 2009). It was interesting to note that half the participants used religious coping as a way of self-control when going through difficult times, either of their emotions and, feelings or to inhibit less desirable behaviour. Self-control, also seen as self-regulation, is reported as a master virtue in the sense that it seemed essential to support people to avoid many vices or sins and behave virtuously (Baumeister & Exline, 1999, 2000). However suppressing desires for 'sins' is not always a good thing if they do not internally identify with the reason for such a suppression.

Interestingly, both study one and study two correlated in terms of the development of self and identity. This link suggests that both internal and external worlds were significant to an individual in order to develop. Participants talked about religion providing guidance and principles to achieve goals as well as have structure in order to live in society. These guidance's and values benefited individuals in terms of being a part of the religious community. Similar to other religions, being part of a religious or spiritual community can have a positive effect on wellbeing. Saroglou and Cohen (2013) suggest that being a part of the same religious community or religious culture promotes a sense of belonging and connection to God. Belonging to a group provides a social world and connecting with others. Participants also mentioned the different tools used such as meditation, devotion and prayer for peace and wellbeing. Poloma and Gallup (1991) claimed that prayer's importance is largely due to its "improving a sense of well-being" (p. 5) as found in this study.

Interestingly, the development of self and their identity was quite prominent in this research particularly with the males in study two. This different focus in religiosity may be partially explained by traditional gender role expectations. For example, women are expected to be communal (i.e., nurturing, cooperative, and submissive), whereas men are expected to be agentic (i.e., independent, self-reliant) (Barry, Bacon, & Child, 1957; D'Andrade, 1989; Eagly, 1987). Therefore being submissive to a higher power may be seen as feminine due to its call for compliance and implied rejection of autonomy.

5.2. Implications for Clinical Practice, limitations of study and recommendations for further Research

5.2.1. Implications for practice

This study was conducted to assist counselling psychologists with the Sikh client group that is under-researched and to provide knowledge of the Sikhs from a Sikh perspective. It is important to recognise that in this study, considering the age group (20-30 year olds) that was studied, this research may be more applicable to young Sikhs rather than Sikhs in general. The research in this study therefore has implications for practice and will guide Counselling Psychologists to learn more about the Sikh religion and young Sikh individuals. The following recommendations are taking into account this study and the literature review.

- O'Connor and Vanderburg (2005) found that Psychologists were likely to view less mainstream religious beliefs as pathological due to lack of familiarity with such religions. Furthermore, they mentioned that being unfamiliar with religious beliefs would mean possibly making poorer

clinical judgements. Subsequently this research will assist Counselling Psychologists to become more knowledgeable about the Sikh religion and young Sikh individuals so that they can access this client group and build a therapeutic relationship to make good sound clinical judgements. This also fits in well with the Professional Practice Guidelines of the BPS (2006) in increasing our multicultural competencies “making [our]selves knowledgeable about the diverse experiences of the clients they work with and challenge the views of people who pathologise on the basis of such aspects as....racial identity and religious and spiritual views (page 7)”. Such an endeavour could serve to redress the underutilisation of services for black and ethnic minority groups.

- Religion and spirituality has been found to be important to the participants in this study. In order for psychologists to address this subject, it may be helpful to include religious and spiritual beliefs in the assessment process. Lochner and Coyle (2011) mentioned that including this at the initial stages can helpfully convey to the client that it is acceptable to discuss these aspects of their life in therapy. This would facilitate in the formulation of the presenting difficulty they bring and consequently inform the type of intervention that may be helpful. Pargament (2007) stated that it may even be valuable to elicit a client's ‘spiritual story’ which may particularly be helpful if their religious or spiritual path is considered relevant to their presenting problems or a potential resource for resolving difficulties.
- It is important for Psychologists to be familiar with a Sikh individual's culture particularly the way in which the religion's guidelines and regulations, as well as meditation and praying benefit Sikhs with coping

with difficulties. In terms of interventions, one that is closely related to the religion may be beneficial. For example, the NICE (2009) guidelines have provided evidence based intervention such as Mindfulness as an appropriate and effective way of helping others to manage depression and anxiety. This would be similar to a Sikh's religious beliefs.

- As religion and spirituality can be a sensitive subject to approach, it may be beneficial for a non-directive approach such as person centred in which the client is based at the centre and the therapist acts as non-coercive company rather than a guide or expert as in other approaches such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Rogers placed great emphasis on the centrality of the client's phenomenological world (Mearns & Thorne, 2013) exploring the development of human consciousness and self-awareness. A CBT approach focuses on changing the way a person thinks and behaves which would not be helpful when working with religion and spirituality as it is not about changing their thoughts. Psychotherapy is helpful in focusing on unconscious thoughts that may have stemmed from childhood experiences. This technique is not necessarily an approach that is required when exploring one's religion and spirituality and its effect on wellbeing. A more non-directive approach that believes in an individual's potential and ability to make the right choices for themselves, regardless of the therapist's own values, beliefs and ideas is a more suitable form of therapy
- In terms of training and supervision, it would be important for counselling or clinical training providers to support and educate trainees to respond effectively to client's religious and spiritual material (see Lochner &

Colye, 2011). Consequently, supervisors would also need to be suitably trained in helping trainees as well as qualified psychologists to comfortably explore their client's religious and spiritual issues (Aten & Hernandez, 2004).

- The Division of Counselling Psychology already have a special interest group with regards to spirituality, however religion does not seem to be an aspect of this group. It would be beneficial for the Division of Counselling Psychology to provide the opportunity for training or workshops on spiritual and religious issues as part of a continued professional development for qualified psychologists.
- Lastly, it would be beneficial for research to continue to explore the religious and spiritual worlds of clients as it would be unlikely for psychologists to continuously and effectively develop their multicultural competencies if research into religious and spiritual views held by individuals from a range of diverse cultural backgrounds remains scarce.

It is important to note that having such beliefs does not mean the individual will be immune to mental health issues. Literature suggested that Sikh's do not tend to seek help for their difficulties and tend to appear in the system when they have reached crisis. The findings in this study will be able to inform a therapists practice in supporting Sikh client's and general clients with their own religious and spiritual beliefs.

5.2.2. Methodological Strengths and Limitations of Study

The thematic analysis was used to explore, flexibly and in more detail the understanding of the Sikh community using a method to identify patterns across

the entire data-set. This approach helped in extracting meaning and concepts from the data. Although this method was argued as most suitable for this part of the study (please see Methodology section), it is not without its pitfalls. The method is largely interpretative and subjective to the researcher who will have their own experiences that could affect the overall analysis. It was ensured that this was minimised by validating themes with supervisors and reflecting on this experience (please see reflexivity). The thematic analysis approach was helpful in developing a general idea of the Sikh community across all ages, however this seemed quite superficial and further exploration of the responses given by the community was required.

Thematic analysis was used instead of content analysis to provide a more qualitative and detailed nuanced account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore only one particular religious background, Sikhism, was explored to gain insight and knowledge in one area, a religion that seems under researched. Thematic analysis looked at the written comments of participants from a questionnaire. It is therefore a research instrument with formulised questions where participants are required to read, comprehend and respond. IPA used interviews where a direct, in-depth conversation between interviewer and participant can take place. Both these methods complemented each other. The questionnaire's responses were objective and in the participants own time whereas the interview can be subjective and in real time. The questionnaire explored participants from different ages, educational backgrounds and levels of commitment to their religion whereas the interviews focused on a particular subset – baptised Sikhs between the age range 20-30 years old with University education. Having both these methods allowed this study to address different

facets of the same phenomenon. The drawback of this means that only a particular subset of participants are explored in greater depth.

From the research that has already been conducted, there had not been a study using IPA, and not one with baptised Sikhs as a specific client group. Using IPA as a methodology has therefore been beneficial in this study in attempting to understand and appreciate a baptised Sikh person's world and the importance religion and spirituality plays in their lives and wellbeing. Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) state that IPA is useful in offering both the subjective experience of participants and an interpretative narrative of this. However all methods have their limitations in that the analysis and interpretations are subjective to the interviewer or researcher. A way in which this limitation was overcome was through supervision and having transcripts examined by two supervisors. Willig (2000) posed an interesting limitation of IPA in terms of social constructionism that language constructs and does not necessarily describe reality. Therefore the interview transcript can be seen as revealing the way in which an individual discusses a particular experience, within a particular context, rather than the actual experience itself.

It was understood that using IPA can be vulnerable to researcher bias, therefore attempts were made to be reflective throughout the research by reflecting on each interview and each client as well as in the way the interviews were analysed. The analysis for each interview was then validated and checked by the research supervisors to be as objective as possible. Supervisors gave constructive feedback on interpretations to ensure objectivity. In addition IPA uses a small sample size (in this case only 6 people) and although provides

valuable knowledge in terms of how religion and spirituality is lived by young Sikhs, it cannot be assumed to be indicative of the generalised population of Sikhs. To strengthen the methodology of the study, thematic analysis was used with a much bigger sample size, in order to see the bigger picture and be relative to the generalised population however it is not necessarily strong in its theoretical base.

5.2.4. Recommendations for further research

The majority of the Sikh participants that took part were between 20-30 years old and the majority of them had been to university. The IPA study also focused on this age group therefore looking at young Sikhs. Arnett (2000) discussed the period from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18-25 as the emerging adulthood. This new conception of development described emerging adults that have not quite left adolescence but have not yet completely entered young adulthood. Although Arnett's (2000) research was USA based, the same may be translated to the UK. It would be interesting for future research to focus on other age groups. For example, how do people in their 30's and their lived experience of religion and spirituality differ to their younger counterparts and is identity formation stabilised at this age as speculated earlier. During the recruitment process, participants had largely been to University (who perhaps can be seen as 'middle class'), it would be useful to recruit people from wider socioeconomic backgrounds. It would be valuable to investigate whether religion and spirituality has the same influences on the wellbeing of Sikh from these different backgrounds.

The Sikh philosophies and perspectives were quite distinct in the present study. For example the Sikh stories however there were findings that was not distinct such as meditation, praying and certain guidelines. Therefore it would be beneficial for further studies to investigate this further with other religions. It would also be valuable for future studies to undertake further research within the Sikh community outside of the UK to see whether results would be replicated. It would also be useful to use other methodologies to explore the Sikh view in more detail.

Interestingly there does not seem to be research in the link between wellbeing, self-development and spiritual strivings. This would be valuable for future studies to explore.

5.3. Conclusion

Although the same religion or culture may be shared between a therapist and a client, there still can be individual differences. Morrison and Borgen (2010) state that although therapists may share cultural overlaps, the sense of connection with the client may unconsciously exclude meaningful explorations of the client's religiousness or spirituality leading to empathy may being hindered. Therefore, it would be important for therapists to actively seek to understand their client's spiritual orientation rather than making assumptions or using religious stereotypes.

This study has not only researched particularly baptised young Sikhs, an area almost unheard of in counselling psychology research, but also using IPA,

which has not been used frequently in studies of religious and spiritual endeavours. This study will give that extra dimension for psychologists and therapists in terms of being able to understand the world view of baptised young Sikhs to truly empathise with this client group, especially clients within the same age category. This research provides the journeys some young Sikh individuals go through (which can be similar to others of the same or different faith) and how they specifically use Sikh principles and tools for their wellbeing. This study will enhance research in counselling psychology with regards to religion and spirituality and mental health. Knowledge gleaned from this study will be beneficial to counselling psychologists if they are to empower and enable their Sikh clients in their therapeutic journeys by adapting their religious and spiritual influences into the therapy process. This will allow other therapists to truly empathise with their Sikh clients and their world view as well as the type of interventions that may be helpful. Knowledge from this study may also inform counselling training, supervision and psychologist's continued professional development.

In conclusion, this research has enhanced knowledge and understanding of young Sikh baptised individuals, exploring their personal and social worlds in order to understand how their lived experience of religion and spirituality assisted with their wellbeing.

CHAPTER 6: Reflections

Firstly it is important to acknowledge that I have had a great deal of time to complete my thesis as I occurred many setbacks due to personal difficulties. This significantly delayed the handing in of my thesis. Having this extra time has been beneficial in shaping my research and helping me develop as a researcher as well as a Psychologist.

6.1. Reason for choosing topic

This topic was chosen to predominantly due to my own interest in spirituality and religion, knowing I had to make it a topic that would sustain my interest over the three years as well as providing knowledge to the body of research in the counselling psychology field. The more research I did in this area to try and find a client group as well as narrowing down my research to a specific question, the more I found that there was not many research done in Sikhism, a relatively new religion, compared to Islam, Christianity etc. I did not think there would be a very big difference however was aware that working in the field, very rarely did Sikhs access psychology services. Interestingly, although I had worked in multicultural and multi-faith communities, I rarely came across Sikhs or Asians contacting the service. The few that I did come into contact with were either very happy to see another Sikh person or initially sceptical in case I knew them or a family member. However they all tended to relax knowing what they would tell me was confidential and this was seen as vital in the professional context.

Having some access to the Sikh community, and having general discussions with others, there were mixed views as there was in the Indian culture, about whether talking about such issues were helpful to discuss with strangers.

6.2. Changing the direction of the study

The research was initially going to use thematic analysis in the first part of the study and then the q-sort methodology for the second part of the study however as the interviews progressed, it became apparent that the data was quite rich and detailed and was more suited to an IPA design. This method also provided an in-depth account of the lived experience of Sikh's which fulfilled the aims of the research question.

6.3. Research skills I have you learnt throughout my research

Undertaking a qualitative piece of research has equipped me with various research skills. Collecting data has allowed me to become more aware of the broad range of methods that could be used and the type of methodologies that best suited my research study. Interviewing participants was very different to providing therapy to clients, a more familiar role. I learnt how interviewing a person was more about asking questions that were relevant to the research question and not exploration around resolving personal or psychological issues. Analysing the data was a difficult task and being exposed to it in both parts of my study helped me to be more creative and make my own judgements to make sense of a large amount of data and examining it to separate what was significant and relevant to my research question and creating themes and construct a conceptual framework. Analysing using thematic and IPA helped me to gain the ability to go beyond description and construct a story which was a

very challenging task. As a result I was able to reflect on my analyses with some objectivity, with a great deal of help from my supervisors.

Writing a thesis facilitated in expanding my ability to write academically and communicating results in a specific way so that it was plausible. I became more competent in researching literature and critically appraising them. I originally found critically appraising literature quite challenging and therefore sought a workshop at the University to increase my knowledge and skill.

6.4 Reflections from undertaking qualitative research and interviews

I had noticed that in the first few interviews I was almost rigid in terms of keeping to the interview schedule and the questions and not venturing out too far afield or asking further probing questions. This was discussed in supervision too and I became more mindful that further questions can be asked to get a better picture of a lived experience.

I was aware that being a baptised Sikh could have had an effect on my participants and with the way they responded to the interview questions, for example, it was speculated whether Harinder was playing out a relationship with myself as she talked about society (the community of Sikhs often). Harinder seemed to seek reassurance from time to time, and I wondered whether she worried about whether I agreed with her views. With Inderjit, he made a comment that I probably know more than him and consequently it was wondered whether Inderjit using words such as 'still room /stages to go', 'to pray more' and "praying 'still' beneficial' in the interview was motivated by his concern with being a baptised Sikh. In this particular instance, my interpretation

could have been affected in terms of whether he held back his views in the fear that I knew more. Consequently, would my particular story for Inderjit have changed?

As the interviews progressed I was more mindful to give space in between questions (due to my reflections as being an interviewer with my supervisor) and more mindful of asking whether to move on to the next part or not with participants. I had reflected that I could have stayed with the participant more and explored their answers rather than hastily moving to the next question. Whilst doing my own personal reflection through journal writing and supervision before the analysis stage (using Pee, Woodman and Davenport, 2002 learning experience framework), I realised that I had my own beliefs about what society means and assumed this was the same for the rest of my participants. With my very first participant, Harinder, she defined society as the community of Sikhs and I naturally took this on board and assumed the other participants defined society in the same way, however this was not always the case. This was then considered for the last three participants. I had started to be more curious with these participants which helped me to more flexible and fluid, giving me more of a sense of the lived experience of religion and spirituality.

Please see my personal reflections for individual participants (Appendix 14).

6.5. How my own identity changed as a result of the research journey

At the beginning of my research journey, I was quite excited about using qualitative methods as it was an area that I felt I needed to expand on to increase my research skills. Whilst using qualitative methods and analysing the

data, I realised how challenging, but rewarding it was. I found it provided great insight to my participants and research question. Interviewing participants about the same religion as myself challenged my own assumptions of society and Sikhs and the many differences of opinions there was. It helped me to become more aware of my own beliefs and values and accepting and celebrating the differences of others.

Whilst undertaking the research, there were some undeniable discrepancies. For example, I at times, assumed that my participants used the word society in the same as me, society of Sikhs and whilst analysing the data making notes and themes, my supervisors had pointed this out. It seems that I had been blind to this and it is quite possible that I might have been blind to many others. For example, with my first participant I had got it very wrong, thinking that she had been thinking from an external frame of reference but on further reflection and feedback from supervisors, it was actually from an internal frame of reference. This showed me that it was so easy to become biased due to my own values and beliefs and how we can sometimes get things wrong. It is therefore incredibly important in qualitative research to get data as well as analyses validated and verified by another in the field, such as supervisors.

6.6. How it will inform my own practice and what I would personally take away

Conducting such research influenced my therapeutic practice in the way I ask client's questions due to newfound knowledge and becoming more aware of my unconscious bias. This research has helped me to become even more mindful with how my own presence in interactions with others (including therapy) can

have an impact on the client and the people around me. It has showed me that someone of the same faith and religious background does not necessarily have the same interpretations and sense making as myself. There are many factors taking place, such as the adoption of the western culture, the Indian culture as well as the religious and spiritual aspect which can be unique to each individual. Having undertaken such a large piece of research has been a rewarding one. This doctorate has not only prepared me as a Counselling Psychologist, it has also equipped me with the knowledge to develop as a competent researcher practitioner.

CHAPTER 7: References & Appendix

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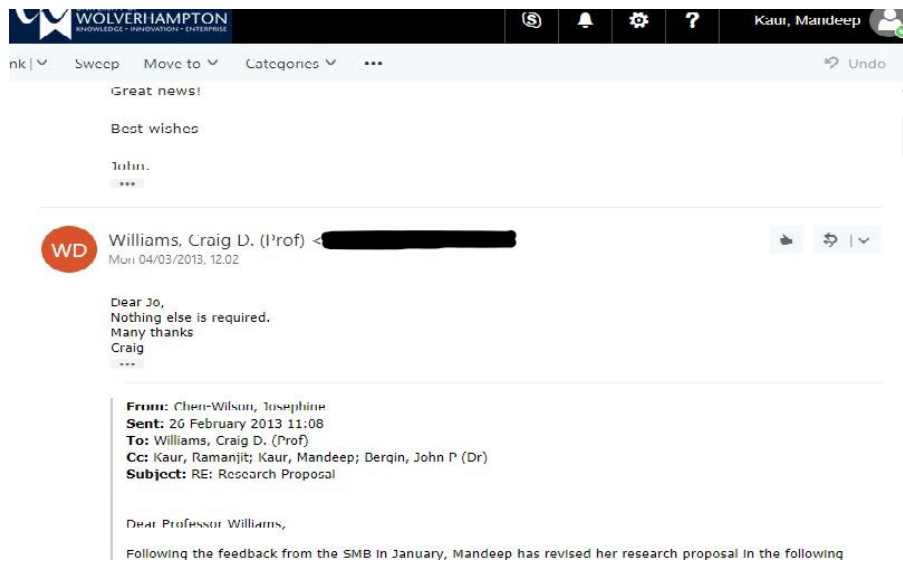
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Appendix 1

SAS and BSEC approval



Appendix 2

BSEC approved Res 20a Form



RES 20A
(October 2003)

School of Applied Sciences Ethics Committee: submission of project for approval

To be completed by SEC:

Date Received:

Project No:

- This form must be word processed – no handwritten forms can be considered
- ALL sections of this form must be completed
- No project may commence without authorisation from the School Ethics Committee

CATEGORY B PROJECTS:

There is identifiable risk to the participant's wellbeing, such as:

- significant physical intervention or physical stress.
- use of research materials which may bring about a degree of psychological stress or upset.
- use of instruments or tests involving sensitive issues.
- participants are recruited from vulnerable populations, such as those with a recognised clinical or psychological or similar condition. Vulnerability is partly determined in relation to the methods and content of the research project as well as an *a priori* assessment.

All Category B projects are assessed first at subcommittee level and once approved are forwarded to the School Ethics Committee for individual consideration. Undergraduates are not permitted to carry out Category B projects.

Title of Project:	"Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Wellbeing within an Asian-Faith Community: How can Counselling Psychologists help?"
Name of Supervisor:(for all student projects)	Dr Josephine Chen-Wilson Dr John Bergin

Name of Investigator(s):	Mandeep Kaur
Level of Research: (Module code, MPhil/PhD, Staff)	Doctorate
Qualifications/Expertise of the investigator relevant to the submission:	BSc Psychology, Certificate & Diploma in Counselling, Research modules on practitioner doctorate course

Participants: Please indicate the population and number of participants, the nature of the participant group and how they will be recruited.	For the first part of the study, it is estimated that twenty people in the Sikh faith, who have been practicing their religion for at least 2-3 years, will be invited to participate in the interviews. The recruitment will focus on Sikhs in the West Midlands via a local Sikh Centre in Birmingham, and other Sikh Temples throughout the West Midlands
--	--

Continued overleaf

Please attach the following and tick the box provided to confirm that each has been included:

Rationale for and expected outcomes of the study	√
Details of method: materials, design and procedure	√
Information sheet* and informed consent form for participants <i>*to include appropriate safeguards for confidentiality and anonymity</i>	√
Details of how information will be held and disposed of	√
Details of if/how results will be fed back to participants	√
Letters requesting, or granting, consent from any collaborating institutions	
Letters requesting, or granting, consent from head teacher or parents or equivalent, if participants are under the age of 16	

Is ethical approval required from any external body? NO (delete as appropriate)

If yes, which Committee?

NB. Where another ethics committee is involved, the research cannot be carried out until approval has been granted by both the School committee and the external committee.

Signed:

(Investigator)

Date:

Signed:

(Supervisor)

Date:

Except in the case of staff research, all correspondence will be conducted through the supervisor.

FOR USE BY THE SCHOOL ETHICS COMMITTEE

Divisional Approval
Granted:

(Chair of Behavioural Sciences Ethics
Committee)

Date:

School Approval
Granted:

(Chair of School Ethics Committee)

Date

Introduction & Rationale

Counselling psychology operates within a multicultural context, requiring that its practitioners take steps to increase their multicultural competencies. One aspect of such competencies refers to the knowledge base of counselling psychologists in terms of diverse black and ethnic minority groups. According to the Professional Practice Guidelines of the BPS (2005), counselling psychologists are required to “make themselves knowledgeable about the diverse experiences of the clients they work with and challenge the views of people who pathologise on the basis of such aspects as....racial identity and religious and spiritual views (page 7)” as well as to “respect the diversity of beliefs and values held within society...(page 3).” Such an endeavour could serve to redress the underutilisation of services for black and ethnic minority groups.

However, it is unlikely for counselling psychologists to continuously and effectively develop their multicultural competencies if research into religious and spiritual views held by individuals from a range of diverse cultural backgrounds remains scarce. Even though Sikhism was recorded at being 0.8% of the UK population, Sikhism is most strongly represented in the West Midlands (Census, 2011). More importantly, it has been reported that this ethnic group has been under researched particularly in relation to the applications of counselling (Sandhu, 2005; Morjaria-Keval, 2006). Based on the national mental illness statistics, 1 in 4 people in the UK will suffer at least one diagnosable episode of mental illness this year alone. This would translate into 200,000 Sikhs or over 900,000 South Asians from every background. Sadly, cultural practices and Asian value systems and traditions can exacerbate the negative impact of mental illness because of how it is perceived by families, friends, clinicians and sometimes by the service user.

Mental illness stigma, superstitions, taboos and discrimination often result in South Asians not receiving timely or appropriate access to mental health services and tend to come into services in crisis. Moreover, of the few exceptions, most research into Asian communities tends to be quantitative in approach and is mostly based on American or Canadian populations. Furthermore, most such studies focus on traumatic experiences with little mention of influences from South Asians' spirituality and religiosity. This study intends to explore the spiritual and religious experience of the Sikh community with a focus on how such an experience affects their sense of wellbeing. This will be looked at by exploring how Sikhs deal with stresses (day to day and bigger stresses such as bereavement and loss etc.). Findings from this research will inform our understanding with regards to:

- How religion and spirituality impact on wellbeing within the Sikh Community.
- How a Sikh client's religious and spiritual influences can be adapted into the therapy process.

As little research has been conducted within the Sikh faith in relation to counselling, interviews will be carried out with a homogenous sample in order to fully make sense of the participants' perspective into religion and spirituality and how these relate to their sense of wellbeing. Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the interviews in the first part of the study. This particular method will allow for flexibility in the choice of theoretical framework. Through this flexibility, thematic analysis allows for rich, detailed and complex description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The key findings from the interview study will then form the concourse to be used in the second study using the Q-sort methodology (Cross 2004).

Knowledge gleaned from this study will be beneficial to counselling psychologists if they are to empower and enable such clients in their therapeutic journeys by adapting their client's religious and spiritual influences into the therapy process.

The study will be in two parts. The findings from the first study will largely inform the second study and will therefore be submitted separately. The aims of the first study are:

1. To explore Sikh participants' experience and view of religion.
2. To explore Sikh participants' experience and view of spirituality.
3. To explore Sikh individuals' views on how religion and spirituality influence their dealing with stresses.

4. To explore Sikh individuals' views on how religion and spirituality affect their wellbeing.

Methodology

Participants

Twenty people in the Sikh faith, who have been practicing their religion for at least 2-3 years, will be invited to participate in the interviews. The homogeneity of this sample will be defined by the participants' dedication to their chosen faith (practicing for at least 2-3 years) and by their shared living environment in the West Midlands. They will be recruited via the local Sikh temples in the West Midlands and Sikh forums in the UK. The local Sikh temples will be contacted via a letter (Appendix 4) requesting permission to conduct this research on their premises as well as permission to put up posters (Appendix 5). An email or message will be put up on Sikh Forums (Appendix 6) requesting for participation in the study. All participants will be required to read the information sheet (Appendix 1) and complete a consent form (Appendix 2) to take part in the study.

Design

This first part of the research will be an interview study. A mixture of open and closed questions will be adopted in a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 3). Questions and prompts will use neutral language in order to allow for further exploring with the participants.

Materials

To conduct interviews for the first part of the study, the following materials will be required:

- Dictaphone and tapes
- Semi-structured Interview schedule

Procedure

Participants from the Sikh Community will be recruited via posters (Appendix 5) or email (Appendix 6) from Sikh Community Forums and from community events regularly attended by the researcher. The Nishkam Centre in Birmingham and Sikh temples, where a number of Sikhs attend will be the primary base to recruit participants.

Participants who reply to the research with an interest to take part will be provided with an information sheet and will be invited to a semi-structured interview. Participants will be interviewed in a room at a local Centre, or in a Sikh temple, if available. This will allow the participant to feel comfortable and be in safe, familiar surroundings. All participants will be briefed about the content of the study and will be asked to sign a consent form before interviews take place.

If English is not the participant's first language, either an interpreter will be used or the researcher will perform the interview in the participant's language (i.e., Punjabi) and go through the information sheet and consent form with the participant. The participant will also be given the option to bring their own interpreter (i.e., family member) if this would make the participant comfortable.

With the permission from the participants, all interviews will be audio taped. The interview schedule will be flexible to give the participant time to think and speak. No specific time frame for interviews will be adopted; however 45 minutes to an hour and a half will be expected. The participants will be informed of their right to withdraw or modify their consent at any time and to ask for the destruction of all or part of the data that they have contributed (Code of Human Ethics, 2010).

It will be ensured that potential harm or risk to the participant is minimised. Participants will be informed of the study and that it may require asking sensitive questions that may cause potential distress. If they are particularly going through a stressful period, they will be advised not to take part. It will be stressed that the interview is not an alternative therapeutic treatment from the outset of recruitment.

The participants will be assured of their right to withdraw at any time and that they do not have to reply to any questions that they are not comfortable with before the interview. If any sign of distress is detected at the interview stage, the participant will be offered either a break or an opportunity to go through some relaxation techniques. They will also be offered to discontinue with the interview if necessary.

Details of how information will be held and disposed of

Participants will be informed that the transcripts and consent forms will be stored in a locked cupboard. This study will ensure that participants will not be identified to ensure confidentiality throughout the study and in further publications. Personal information will not be transcribed and pseudonyms will be used if the discussion is related to individual participants to ensure confidentiality. The recordings and transcripts will be kept in the possession of the researcher for a period of three years, after which it will be destroyed.

Details of if/how results will be fed back to participants

Participants will be informed that individual feedback will not be accessible, however a lay summary of results will be made available upon request in November 2014.

Appendix 3

Questionnaire/Survey for Study one



Questionnaire

“Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Wellbeing within an Asian-Faith Community: How can Counselling Psychologists help?”

Researcher: Mandeep Kaur (Trainee Counselling Psychologist,
University of Wolverhampton)

Section 1

Please note that you do not have to complete all questions in this questionnaire. However, it will help me with my research if you could provide some background information.

Age: _____

Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

Level of Education: _____

Country of Birth: _____

If your Country of Birth is not UK, how long have you been living in UK for?

Section 2

This section is about how you would define spirituality and religion. There is no right or wrong answer for this section, please answer as honestly as you can. If your first language is not English or you find it difficult to write in English, please write in a language that you prefer.

What is your definition of Spirituality?

What is your definition of Religion?

Thank you for your time and help!



Appendix 4

Letter to Local Sikh Temples

Mrs Mandeep Kaur
Counselling Psychologist in Training
c/o Dr Josephine Chen-Wilson
University of Wolverhampton
MH Building
Nursery Street
Wolverhampton,
WV1 1AD
Date:

Sikh Gurdwara address

Dear Mr/Mrs_____

Re: Permission to conduct research study

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research at your Sikh Gurdwara. I am currently studying for the Doctorate Practitioner qualification in Counselling Psychology at the University of Wolverhampton. As part of my training, I am conducting a research into: "Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Wellbeing within an Asian-Faith Community: How can Counselling Psychologists help?"

This study intends to explore the spiritual and religious experience of the Sikh community in particular in relation to their wellbeing. My aim is to increase the knowledge base within the Psychology field in the hope of helping the Asian Faith community better access mental health services.

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee in the School of Applied Sciences and will adhere to the Code of human research ethics published by the British Psychological Society.

If your permission is granted, I will recruit participants at the Gurdwara by putting up posters on the temple premises and approaching people in the Langar Hall (the place where people congregate to eat or talk). I would like to speak to individuals committed to the Sikh faith in interviews for about 45 minutes. I will be asking them questions such as how spirituality and religion affect their wellbeing and ability to deal with difficulties and stress. It will be greatly appreciated, if there is a room available at the Gurdwara for me to conduct these interviews. The data/results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and to be used on educational purposes only.

Your approval to conduct this study will be deeply appreciated. If there are any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on [e-mail address redacted]

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Mandeep Kaur
Counselling Psychologist in Training

Appendix 5

Poster

Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Wellbeing within an Asian-Faith Community

Mandeep Kaur (Trainee Counselling Psychologist, University of Wolverhampton)

What is this?

I am undertaking a study to explore the spiritual and religious experience of the Sikh community and their relation to wellbeing

What does it involve?

You are invited to a short interview to talk about your experiences of religion/spirituality. We would like to know how these experiences have impacted on your wellbeing and the way you deal with stresses.

**TAKE
PART!**

NOW!

Get involved

If you would like to take part in my research, please either contact me [REDACTED] or fill in the contact information sheet provided and return it to the office in the temple.



Appendix 6

Message/Email to Forums or social media

Dear All Forum Users/Name,

I am currently studying the Doctorate Practitioner in Counselling Psychology at the University of Wolverhampton. As part of my training, I am conducting a research into: "Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Wellbeing within an Asian-Faith Community: How can Counselling Psychologists help?"

I am writing to request your valuable time and participation in my study. This study intends to explore the spiritual and religious experience of the Sikh community in particular in relation to their wellbeing. My aim is to increase the knowledge base within the Psychology field in the hope of helping the Asian Faith community access mental health services.

I would like to interview twenty Sikhs (male or female) who have been practicing their religion for at least 2-3 years. This interview will take place at your local Sikh Gurdwara or Health Centre and will last for about 45 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped so I can analyse them fully to improve our understanding. Please be assured that all interviews will be kept strictly confidential and personal information will be removed from the transcripts. Any information collated will only be used for educational purposes.

If anyone is interested to take part, please private message me on this forum and let me know how you would like to be contacted (e.g., telephone, email, post). I attach an information sheet and a consent form with more details of the study. I would like to add that as the questions on religion and spirituality might bring up sensitive issues to some, it is not advisable to take part if you are currently going through a difficult period. The interview is not an alternative therapeutic treatment for people who partake in. Unfortunately, I will not be able to provide any therapeutic treatments as a result of you taking part. I hope you may appreciate this.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

Mandeep Kaur.

Appendix 7

Information sheet for Study one



“Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Wellbeing within an Asian-Faith Community: How can Counselling Psychologists help?”

Researcher: Mandeep Kaur (Trainee Counselling Psychologist,
University of Wolverhampton)

Information sheet

Dear delegate,

I am carrying out a research into impact of religion and spirituality on wellbeing within an Asian-Faith Community as part of my doctorate training in Counselling Psychology at the University of Wolverhampton.

From carrying out interviews in the Sikh community, I have noticed diverse and interesting ways in which Sikh individual think about religion and spirituality. I would like to invite you to tell me how you view these two concepts by defining them in your own words on a short questionnaire.

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of Wolverhampton. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you do not have to answer all the questions. Personal information will not be collected by the questionnaire. The completed consent forms will stored securely and separately from the questionnaires. All information collected in this study will be securely stored for three years and then destroyed after the study is completed. The results of the study will be written up in a thesis and further publications. However, individuals will not be identified from any further publication of the research.

If you would like to take part, please complete the questionnaire and the consent form and return them to the two separate boxes at the reception. Please note that you will not be able to withdraw your information from the study once you return the consent form and the questionnaire to the boxes. As the questionnaire only collates anonymous data, it will not be possible to identify any individual from the dataset. A summary of my study will be available from October 2014. Please email me to obtain a copy [e-mail address redacted]

Please feel free to ask me any questions about the study at the conference. I will be at the reception most of the time.

Thank you for your time.

Researcher: Mandeep Kaur (Trainee in Counselling Psychology, University of Wolverhampton)

Appendix 8

Consent form for Study one



GENERAL CONSENT FORM AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW

“Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Wellbeing within an Asian-Faith Community: How can Counselling Psychologists help?”

Researcher: Mandeep Kaur (Trainee Counselling Psychologist,
University of Wolverhampton)

Before agreeing to take part in this study, please read the following information carefully.
Please initial the boxes.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet provided for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that all information obtained from me during the study will be anonymous and be kept confidential | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving any reason before I return the anonymous questionnaire. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to take part in the above study. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I understand that I do not have to answer all the questions on the Questionnaire. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I give permission for the researcher to use the anonymous information collated in this study in her thesis and further publications. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

..... Name of Participant Date Signature
..... Name of Researcher Date Signature

Appendix 9

Semi-structured Interview Schedule for Study two

Before the interview, participants will be reminded of confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study and to withhold their answer to any of the questions. The schedule will be used as a guide only and the participants will be encouraged to freely discuss their views on religion and spirituality and their effects on their wellbeing.

Part 1 – brief information

- 1) What is your age?
- 2) Please state your gender
- 3) What religious or spiritual category do you feel closest to?
- 4) How long have you practiced this particular faith?
- 5) How committed are you to this faith?

Part 2 – Intro question

- a) I am looking at the effects of religion and spirituality on Sikh individuals, how would you describe the differences or similarities of these?

Prompts: Do you believe they are different? If so, how? Do you believe they are the same? If so, how?

Part 3 – Exploring lived experience of religion

- a) What is your experience of religion?

Prompts: How would you define it? What does religion mean to you? How does religion impact your life? Advantages and Disadvantages of religion?

- b) How has it impacted on how you deal with stresses (day to day and bigger stresses)?

Prompts: How would you define day to day stresses? If this is difficult, ask to give one example, and discuss how they dealt with this issue. Has religion impacted on the way you deal with these? If not, how have you dealt with them?

Prompts: How would you define bigger stresses or mental distress? Has religion helped you to deal with big stresses? If so, in what way?

- c) How has it impacted on your wellbeing?

Prompts: How would you define wellbeing (e.g., looking after yourself; keep you in high spirits, feel ok within yourself, feel at peace, harmony etc)? How has religion helped in your wellbeing? If so, in what way?

Part 4 – Exploring lived experience of spirituality

- a) What is your experience of spirituality?

Prompts: How would you define it? What does spirituality mean to you? How does spirituality impact your life? Advantages and Disadvantages of spirituality?

- b) How has it impacted on how you deal with stresses (day to day and bigger stresses)?

Prompts: How has spirituality helped you to deal with stresses?

- c) How has it impacted on your wellbeing?

Prompts: How has spirituality helped in your wellbeing?

Appendix 10

Information sheet for Study two



This study intends to explore the spiritual and religious experience of the Sikh community in particular in relation to their wellbeing. This study will be undertaken by Mandeep Kaur, a Counselling Psychologist in training from the University of Wolverhampton under the supervision of Dr Josephine Chen-Wilson and Dr John Bergin.

Your participation in the research study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. As a Counselling Psychologist in training, I will adhere to the Code of Ethics by the British Psychological Society in that every individual who takes part in the study will be treated with respect and dignity.

Before agreeing to be part of this study, please read the following information carefully.

What does the study involve?

The study will require you to take part in an interview regarding your experiences of religion and spirituality and how these have impacted on how you deal with stresses and your wellbeing. With your permission, this interview will be recorded via a Dictaphone. Please be assured that you do not have to answer all the questions during the interview and you can withdraw from the study at any time.

Some of the interview questions might bring up sensitive issues. Therefore, it is not advisable to take part if you are currently going through a difficult period. The interview is not an alternative therapeutic treatment for people who partake in. Unfortunately, I will not be able to provide any therapeutic treatments as a result of you taking part.

What will happen to the information I provide?

All information you provide will remain anonymous and be kept securely in a locked cabinet that is not publically accessible. The transcript of the interview will be anonymous by removing personal information. This study will ensure that pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality throughout the study and in further publications. The signed consent forms will be stored separately from the transcripts. The anonymous transcripts may need to be made available to examiners and supervisors of this research upon request.

If you do consent to take part in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any point. Please be aware that individual feedback will not be available. However the outcome of the study will be made available around November in 2014 upon request. Please retain this information sheet for future reference. If you would like further information, please contact me on [e-mail address redacted]

If you would like to take part in the study, please read and fill out the consent form attached.

Thank you,

Mandeep Kaur
Trainee Counselling Psychologist, University of Wolverhampton

Appendix 11

Consent form for Study two



"Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Wellbeing within an Asian-Faith Community: How can Counselling Psychologists help?"

Researcher: Mandeep Kaur (Trainee Counselling Psychologist,
University of Wolverhampton)

Before agreeing to take part in this study, please read the following information carefully.

- I confirm that I have read the Information sheet and I understand that
 - I can withdraw from the research at any time and this will not have any negative consequences for me
 - I do not have to answer all the questions in the interview
 - **All information obtained from me during the study will be kept confidential**
 - The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed with all personal information removed
 - The results of the study will be written up in a thesis and further publications. However, individuals will not be identified from any further publication of the research.

I _____ (please print your name) consent to take part in the study
conducted by Mandeep Kaur.

Sign

Date

Appendix 12

Table of themes for participants for Study two

Harinder <u>Developing her identity</u>	Inderjit <u>Inner resolve</u>	Sandeep <u>Exercising control of his life</u>	Pritam <u>Constructing his own interpretation and understanding</u>	Kiran <u>Religion and spirituality saved her</u>	Balwinder <u>Identifying himself thought connection and controlling thoughts</u>
<p>Emotional connection with God God is a feeling Feelings are important</p> <p>Spirituality seen as constructive</p> <p>Religion and spirituality should be the same</p> <p>Society is oppressive/rest rictive</p> <p>Transformation the self Self at different stages Sikh as an identity External vs Internal world Meaning of religion evolved over time</p> <p>Religion seen as undesirable Religion seen as neutral Religion seen as desirable</p> <p>Psychological consequences/i mpact of childhood Impact of upbringing Psychological impact</p> <p>Religious coping gives sense of control</p>	<p>Defining religion and spirituality</p> <p>Sikhism/Religio n is an inner experience</p> <p>Own knowledge is important</p> <p>Society are not helpful</p> <p>Making sense of life</p> <p>Managing and coping with stress Stress considered as logical How stress is viewed? Praying and stress How Sikhism helps with stress</p> <p>Positive feelings</p>	<p>Spirituality and religion seen as separate but work hand in hand</p> <p>Spirituality and religion can help to express/control vices</p> <p>Spirituality is the connection</p> <p>Religion is the tool</p> <p>Development of Self and independence</p> <p>Utilitarian (practical) view of religion</p> <p>An Aid to wellbeing Stresses Meditation is helpful An Acknowledgment of the efficacy of Prayer</p> <p>Coping with Loss</p>	<p>Management of Stress</p> <p>Own knowledge & experience important</p> <p>Religion helps in channelling thoughts and feelings</p> <p>Religion is Positive</p> <p>Sikhism is a part of my identity</p> <p>Making sense of life</p> <p>Religion gives a different perspective to cope</p> <p>Acceptance of death</p>	<p>Religion and spirituality are interlinked</p> <p>Own knowledge & experience important</p> <p>Developme nt of self in phases Self and Others Finding Self Stable present self Looking within Self</p> <p>Manageme nt of stress</p> <p>Making sense of life</p> <p>Religious coping Meditation is beneficial</p>	<p>Spirituality and religion seen as separate but intertwined</p> <p>Identity as a religious person</p> <p>Connection is important</p> <p>Religion changes over time</p> <p>Controlling thoughts is important</p> <p>Making sense of life</p> <p>Religion provides a guideline</p> <p>Life prior to baptism</p> <p>Existential Crisis</p> <p>Religious Coping Definition of wellbeing</p>

Appendix 13

Master themes table for Study two

THEMES	Harinder	Inderjit	Sandeep	Pritam	Kiran	Balwinder
<i>Religious and spiritual struggles – some degree of internal conflict</i>	<p>'I want to go out and go drinking or what not.'(line 55)</p> <p>'...my father felt ill and urm then like I said, I was out, when things are out of your control that's when I started to turn toward religion' (line 109)</p> <p>'I believe that was a spiritual connection between me and God then as well because urn because it was a miracle.....'(Line 109)</p>	<p>'... nothing stresses me out, exams, anything like that, I mean... I mean the only time I was stressed a little bit I think was when my sister was having erm... her kid, my nephew.' (Line 95)</p>	<p>'Erm.. but there's one, one thing that was a major part of my life, that was the death of my gran (line 74-75).</p> <p>'Erm.. I think the reason why I wasn't affected as I thought I would be was because erm...because we're Sikhs, it helps to erm.. it helps to .. what's the word?... to deal with these kinds of issues.' (line 80-83)</p>	<p>'Erm.. there was a Saint that passed away, erm.. many years ago, probably about, closer to 8 to 10 years ago, and I had no direct relationship with them, I had no erm.. real erm.. you know how sometimes you're very close to somebody?' (line 56-59).</p> <p>'And so that helped me accept it because you know, if you think about it, if somebody hadn't said that erm.. what other kind of support could somebody offer?' (line 64-66)</p>	<p>'before I was practising, my way of dealing with stress was anger, so losing my temper or just drinking' (line 22).</p> <p>'better insight' (line 96).</p> <p>'..It's helped majorly. Erm... before I was practising, my way of dealing with stress was anger, so losing my temper or just drinking. 2 things that I... there were only 2 things I knew how to deal with stress is just drink and that's because it's kind of like a sociable thing...'(line 22)</p>	<p>'... I wasn't very open-minded but when I developed that mind set, then I started to explore more about religion..' (Line 32)</p> <p>'...taking things to heart too quickly, thinking about something longer than you really should and allowing the thought to fester in your mind until you become you know, really upset basically....' (Line 46)</p>
<i>Religion and spirituality assisted with the development of self or identity</i>	<p>..but that's just my perception of religion, what other people told me what religion was and what I saw people showed me what religion was.... (line 47)</p> <p>'it's just a case that in society today unfortunately for me it doesn't do that..' (line 30)</p>	<p>'Which is, you know I don't think anyone has the right to tell anybody you know you're doing this wrong or you know you're doing this, this is bad or you know this is against Sikhi 'cos Sikhi is very individualistic..' (line 59)</p> <p>'I do whatever..I do what makes me happy, but I know deep down that I've still gotta make improvements..' (line 63)</p>	<p>'Erm.. and that's what helps me to live for myself and what I mean by that is erm.. is not really caring what society thinks of me..' (line 46)</p> <p>'..very concerned about the way I appear, the way people see me, erm, whereas now I'm more like... I'm more concerned about myself and I know that sounds really selfish, I don't mean it in a selfish way..' (line 18)</p>	<p>'Because, you know, if you're given a kind of principle to follow to say that, look, be happy, or rehat as they call it in the Sikhi, erm.. it just manifests itself because it's in your being anyway, you've got that on your mind to be like that so you just manifest it automatically straightaway. Whether that means you are serving the community, whether that means you recognise yourself as a tool, that you are here</p>	<p>'..Erm I'm trying to get in tune with myself so I get to know myself very well so that I can be the best person that I can possibly be for the people around me and for the world around me. Erm, so yeah...' (line 20)</p>	<p>'...People can get too caught up with dos and don'ts. People can kind of have a superiority complex where they think that, I'm following a religion, as you know, even in Sikhism, ego is a big thing, so by being religious, you might boast about it or worse, you might use it to oppress another person or look down upon another person' (line 22)</p> <p>'And I basically saw something in them that I</p>

			'Sikhi is very individualistic..' (line 56)	for a reason.' (line 94)		lacked myself so that's why I kind of tried to explore religion and then the more you get into it...' (line 32)
<i>Spiritual strivings</i>	<p>'I felt spiritually connected to God and when my dad fell ill. And I think the reason for that is because those were my most sma so the times where I've been most urm...uneasy in my life or out of control of my life or the worst periods of my life....' (line 119)</p> <p>'being religious is when you love God in a certain way, so urm, it should really be how you feel, cuz falling in love is how you feel so it should be how you feel that you respond in that manner....' (line 51)</p>	<p>'It's more about what do I do with my down time, like when I'm doing paath, what I am thinking of? Is my mind actually blank or am I actually thinking about something or am I trying to converse with God?' (line 157)</p> <p>'I'm trying to clear my mind and just do it from my heart. And then I always try and do it when I do ardaas, try and kind of have a little conversation.' (line 157-159)</p>	<p>'..I think that's a good thing to do but I personally don't like doing that because it feels like I'm just using God when I want to and I don't think about him after (laughs)...'(line 61)</p> <p>'It's good because you should have that love and respect to know that God will give you what you want and it's not like it's a bad thing to ask for but erm.. I know, things like, there's erm.. some kind of erm..that you need to.. there's a level...' (line 66)</p>	<p>'And really religion – it's more of a channel or a way to implement those thoughts and that energy, if you will, and to kind of implement it and put it into a form where you can.. where you can act on it, so you're not just having these thoughts, where you can actually implement these things and put them into practice as well.' (line 16)</p> <p>'I personally have always been a bit of a deep thinker so I guess if we take religion out of the equation again' (line 114)</p>	<p>'..And Sikhi is kind of like always taught me, you know, that's like one of the main things we know, in Sikhi, erm.. and there is a reason why it's there, I trust Sikhi, I trust Sikhi with my life because it saved me...' (line 116)</p>	<p>'...you have a sense of faith that goes with it so you have to have faith in that religion that by doing this certain thing, it will actually get me somewhere or it will benefit me greatly, and also religion is a way of erm, kind of feeling closer to the fellow human being, if you will, cos if you both follow the same religion, you kind of feel like you are heading in the same direction, living the same sort of life...' (Line 16)</p> <p>'...you could actually feel that sensation of God everywhere, so that's what I class as spiritual' (line 68)</p>
<i>An aid to wellbeing – Religious/Spiritual Coping</i>	<p>'...but then when I was singing hymns or I was urm praying, I felt as though that was something in my control that was going to have an effect on his health because I had faith and that..' (line 69)</p> <p>'and prayers and stuff that will help me, singing hymns helps me so when I'm really really stressed I can sit down and I can listen to some hymns' (line 67)</p>	<p>'.....so everything I do, I do it because I want to do it, so you know I might not get all my paath done every single day but I do the best I can.... I do whatever..I do what makes me happy, but I know deep down that I've still gotta make improvements..' (line 63)</p>	<p>'I think spirituality... that's erm.. obviously, my views of spirituality is meditation and prayers and connecting to it all' (Line 123)</p> <p>'Erm.. just like because like I said before, I'd say it's more, religion is more like a tool..' (line 102)</p>	<p>'Erm..I think my day-to-day stresses – it's erm.. it's a little bit harder to control because, you know, obviously on a regular basis, erm.. one of the erm.. principles of Sikhi is that whatever happens, it's meant to happen for a reason.' (line 38)</p>	<p>'...Erm... and those guidelines are kind of like...have kind of helped me in my well-being because like it's one thing that Sikhs can't do is can't drink...' (line 36)</p> <p>'...it's like learning how to deal with it erm... and I think just having that there, just knowing that you can't turn to alcohol, you've got to do something else...' (line 38)</p>	<p>'....What Sikhism does just by daily routine, like meditation and nitnem, doing seva and going Gurughar...it kind of calms the mind a little bit and those kind of stresses go away.....' (line 60)</p>

Appendix 14

Personal Reflections for Individual Participants for Study two

Harinder - My role as an interviewer with this participant was an interesting one and I wondered whether a relationship with society was being played out through me. There were times throughout the interview where Harinder seemed to be seeking reassurance from me or seemed worried that I did not agree with her views. Did she see me as an expert due to being aware of my study or did she see me as a member of 'her society' being Sikh myself. At one point in the interview when she wanted me to stop the interview for reassurance she seemed almost relieved when I had said there was no right or wrong answer. I was quite surprised as I thought she was doing ok. I wondered whether this was common; she had mentioned in the interview at a later stage that she had to be normal for others. As the interview progressed, Harinder seemed to become more confident in her own opinions. It was interesting that Harinder mentioned very little pre-16 year of age, a time when she was not committed to her religion. Was being committed her most important years of her life or was she blocking her childhood memories that may have been too painful before 16 years of age?

Inderjit - There were parts throughout the interview where there was signs that maybe being a baptised Sikh as a researcher had an effect on how Inderjit performed particularly in the first 10 minutes of the interview. For example at line 64 Inderjit mentioned that "You probably know more than me" followed by a nervous laugh. Inderjit seemed to be testing my reaction perhaps when he discussed his own individual experience of religion and other's in his religion. Inderjit, at times, seemed to be observing my facial reactions to his responses (moving in closer and keeping a steady gaze when giving his own opinion). Being aware of this I realised that I did not show a response in terms of agreeing or disagreeing which seemed to enable Inderjit to discuss more freely, however I did wonder whether my reactions would have made a difference to Inderjit's responses, especially as Inderjit seemed to have a strong sense of his own opinions and judgements. It could be that this partly motivated him to mention sayings such as 'still room /stages to go', 'to pray more' and "praying 'still' beneficial' in the interview.

Sandeep - I was mindful to give space in between questions (due to my reflections as being an interviewer with my supervisor) hence being more mindful of asking whether to move on to the next part or not. On reflection, I could have stayed with the participant more and explored their answers rather than hastily moving to the next question. Whilst doing my own personal reflection before the analysis stage, I realised that I had my own beliefs about what society means and assumed this was the same for the rest. With my very first participant, she defined society as the community of Sikhs and I naturally took this on board and assumed the other participants defined society in the same way, however this was not the case. This will be considered for future analyses.

This particular participant appeared fairly nervous at the beginning of the interview however engaged well throughout the interview. Once the interview was completed, he did mention that he felt quite conscious when discussing subjects quite personal to him. His own personal experiences of religion and spirituality was quite sensitive subject and although he was comfortable talking about them, he was more conscious with the fact that he felt he always struggles to express himself to others and worries how he sometimes comes across – although he did not care what other's think, he did at times. Sandeep also thanked me for changing the subject about his Gran when prompted. He mentioned that he was uncomfortable talking about his Gran is such depth as he was worried about his feelings associated with this however felt he talked about it as much as he wanted to and felt ok to move on.

It was interesting with the first three participants, who seemed to have some similar and different ways of benefiting (or not in some cases) from having religion and spirituality. For example, both Sandeep and Harinder found religion to help manage or control their vices and give the tools. So far, religion has been said to be quite restrictive by Harinder and Inderjit,

however still beneficial in different ways. I wondered whether religion and spirituality benefited the participants in areas that they may feel they need more help in. In Sandeep's case, his emotions. In Inderjit's case, his own inner resolve and in Harinder, the control between her inner and outer world.

Pritam - The conversation in the interview seemed to flow quite nicely and I was able to ask more open questions away from the script, as I became more confident in interviewing and being an interviewer. Although Pritam seemed quite relaxed and confident in the interview, he sometimes spoke in third person or about people in general rather than his own thoughts and feelings of himself, at times. I wondered whether he sometimes struggled to talk about himself in first person, being too close to home. I had noticed that whilst talking about stresses, Pritam used more terms such as 'erm' and slightly longer pauses. A personal surprise to me was when Pritam talked about a death that 'broke him' but he had no connection and it came across that he had not met this person in real life. I initially found it difficult to understand why a connection was not felt, but he felt deeply sad. It came to light later that he had a respect for wiser more spiritually advanced people than him, almost like his teachers which gave him answers to his life's questions. Interestingly Pritam talked about his general lived experience of religion and spirituality and his view point on this and discussed this learning and constructing in first person. When we discussed stresses like day to day stresses, even bigger stresses to an extent, Pritam would start to discuss in third person perspective.

Kiran - Throughout the interview, I found that I was very engaged in the whole interview process with Kiran, becoming more curious about her spiritual and personal development. Kiran was very open and honest about her journey, and I felt I could ask follow up questions from her answers to get a fuller picture of her experiences. Being curious seemed to help me be less rigid and not just following the interview script, as I had done with possible the previous interviews. I was able to be more flexible and fluid and it felt the interview and conversations we had flowed, giving me more of a sense of the lived experience of religion and spirituality.

When the interview was completed Kiran was quite surprised that it had ended, I was also very surprised that the interview was completed – the time seemed to have gone very quickly; maybe we were both absorbed within the interview process. It came across as if Kiran did not want the interview to end and could have carried on talking; she mentioned at line 128 that it had gone by so quick and whether she should have talked more. I gave her the opportunity to talk more if needed and asked whether there was anything more she wanted to say or if we missed anything but there was nothing more to discuss. However on reflection and after analysing the transcript, I feel Kiran may have had more to say.

Balwinder - I had noticed that in the first few interviews I was almost rigid in terms of keeping to the interview schedule and the questions and not venturing out too much or asking further questions a lot. This was discussed in supervision too and I became more mindful that further question can be asked to get a better picture of a lived experience.

There was a moment at Line 25 where I asked quite a closed question and on reflection more my own beliefs. My question here could have been more open – I seem to have given him different choices and his own personal reasons for this might have been different. This line of questioning seems to support my own beliefs – that people change over time dependent on the person. I could have instead asked why he felt people did this (in terms of his previous answer) I wondered whether this would have directed him to answer in a different way, however he did not agree or disagree with those suggestions and seemed to initially be directed; He started to expand on this in his own view. As I was quite absorbed into what he was saying I had forgotten the original question. It would have been interesting material.